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"OH, HAVE MERCY UPON ME," SHE CRIED, THROWING HERSELF AT HER HUSBAND'S FEET. "I WOULD FAR RATHER DIE THAN BE YOUR WIFE!"

SOLD FOR GOLD;

Or, ALMOST LOST.

BY MRS. M. V. VICTOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT OF A TRAGEDY.

THE audience crowds into the ill-fated Brooklyn Theater this damp, chilly December night;

by ones, twos, threes the people enter and troop to their places, smiling, careless, eager to be amused.

It is near the holidays and the most of them are in a holiday mood; they have thrown off care and weariness for the time, and have come here in search of pleasure, blind to the horrible fate which is so soon to engulf so many of them.

Among the last to arrive, after the curtain has risen on the first scene of the 'Two Orphans,' appear a couple who attract lingering glances

from those near them, as the usher shows them to reserved seats well forward in the parquet. They are an old gentleman and a young lady. At first glance one would decide them to be father and daughter, for he must be near sixty and she sixteen or seventeen, yet a second look assures the observer that this is not the relationship between them. His gay air, his elaborate dress, the orange-flower in his button-hole, and above all the glances he gives the girl by his side, proclaim him a bridegroom. No wonder his neighbors of the evening look and smile. Orange-blossoms on the breast of sixty!

It brings the tears to some womanly eyes to turn from him to the bride. She is sweet, fair and fresh as a half-blown rose; the face under the lace opera-bonnet is as lovely as any the lights of any theater ever shone upon—and it is as pale as though she were dressed for her grave instead of her bridal. Her large eyes are deeply blue as summer morning-glories; her hair is fine and flossy as an infant's, with a tinge of gold on its fluffy masses; her budded lips, sweet as love's very own, quiver now and then, despite of the effort she is making to preserve her self-control.

One can read the whole story, as if printed in a book!

Sold for gold!

Yes, that is the whole sad truth.

A mother has given her only daughter—her pure, lovely, exquisite child, God's gift to her, so unworthy of it—to this rich old widower, who has children older than she who now sits by his side in fear, trembling and loathing.

Only a few hours ago the ceremony—a wicked mockery—making them man and wife, took place, very privately, in the humble parlor of one of those small, old-fashioned wooden houses which still cumber some parts of Brooklyn Heights. The mother and a seamstress, who had been busy on the wedding clothes, with a friend from the adjoining house, were the only witnesses, beside the clergyman who married them.

The bridegroom's son and daughter were not there. They would know nothing of this "crazy infatuation" of their father until they should chance to learn of it afterward.

"Anson Le Roy Doubleday to Bessie, daughter of Harriet and the late Robert Britton."

Such a notice as that in the evening papers would have startled that haughty son and daughter out of their well-bred self-possession, had they read it.

However, it was not the purpose of Mr. Doubleday to publish his folly immediately to the world. A month of quiet enjoyment of his young wife's society, under her mother's roof—then a careful breaking of the news to those most interested, and the introduction of the unwelcome bride to his own magnificent home in that "street of palaces" over the river in the greater metropolis—this was his plan.

So to-night he brings her to the theater, quite sure that none of his friends will be present.

The play goes on; but some people find the young bride's pale, half-frightened, lovely face more interesting than the touching scenes upon the stage. She has her wistful eyes upon the actors, but she sees, comprehends, nothing of

what is before her; her small gloved hands are clinched together in her lap; she is drawn away as far as possible from the courtly, gray-haired, devoted lover, who looks at her with the air of an owner; she is thinking one thought only—how she hates him!

Why did she yield to her worldly mother's importunities? Why did she allow herself to be coaxed, threatened, scolded, persecuted into this unholy alliance? Ah! she had *lied* to God and man, when she took those vows this afternoon!

"If I had gone and jumped into the river!" she kept thinking. "If I could yet get away from him and jump into the river!"

So runs and whirls the idea persistently in her poor aching brain, while the play goes on, almost to the end.

Almost—never quite to the end.

Something is being said and done on the stage which is not set down in the lines. There is a strange glare overhead. Then a cry of "Fire!"

Bessie is not aware of what is happening; that song about the river hums in her brain.

The people about her rise; her husband, grasping her arm, drags her to her feet.

"It is time we were out of this," he says.

Time, indeed! The curtain is blazing—the ceiling! Her companion has lifted her bodily and set her down in the aisle, holding her stoutly by the arm. She is crowded, pushed, crushed; her hat is gone, her hair streaming; she cannot breathe for the smoke and the crush. How horrible it is! But her husband has her by the arm, and for once—if never before or never again—she is glad to feel him her protector. She had sometimes—indeed, only the moment before—wished for death; but not death in this terrible shape! Oh, not to be trampled on; not to be left in that fiery furnace! She clung desperately to this man whom she abhorred.

He spoke to her, but she could hear nothing in the tumult; she was confident he would not desert her. Nor would he, for Doubleday was brave, cool, every inch a man, in such an emergency; he would have perished beside his bride rather than have saved himself by quitting her; but he was fleshy and short-breathed, the conflict told on him fearfully; and then—there came an irresistible rush of the struggling crowd which tore his hold from the arm of his child-wife and swept him on—on—to the door—into the lobby—out on the street—and she was left behind!

He raved—he fought his way partially back—he was frantic with the purpose to return into the burning building; but it could not be done. Smoke and flame met him at every turn. If she was *there*, no help of his would avail.

Then he began to hope that she had been saved; that she, as well as himself, though torn from him, had been swept forth into the safe outer world by that rush of imperiled humanity which had borne him on its current.

He glared eagerly into every woman's face; he questioned others as excited as himself; he was like a madman, until nearly every one except the police and firemen had left the fatal spot of that heart-rending tragedy—turned from it, little dreaming of what they left

behind; only congratulating themselves on their own safety.

Then, the thought presenting itself that if Bessie has escaped, being separated from him, it would be natural she should make her way home, which was not a great distance from the scene of the disaster, he hurries to Mrs. Britton's house, who comes herself, smiling and pleasant, to open the door. She has a little feast ready to serve when the new-married pair shall return.

"Where is Bessie?" she quickly asks, staring at this strange apparition of a man white as death, hatless, his fine coat torn, the orange-flower gone from its lapel.

"Is she not here? Did she not come home?"

"Home, without you? I have not seen her!" Mrs. Britton had heard the fire bells ring, but she had heard nothing of the burning of the theater. She now imagined that her young daughter had at last rebelled—had run away—or told this rich man, to his face, how she hated him. Yet this would not account for his strange appearance, but in emergencies we do not reason out matters coolly.

The bridegroom staggered into the hall.

"What has Bessie done?" asked the worldly-minded mother.

"What has that child done?" he groaned.

"She is dead—dead!" and he burst into tears and groans.

Then down upon the wretched parent fell the sudden story of her daughter's loss. Her punishment was swift and awful.

Of course neither of them gave up all hope that night, but as the weary hours dragged on, with those of the following day and the next, these two were forced, however, to believe in the sad reality of their loss.

Not even a separate grave for that fair child with the morning-glory eyes, the miracle of golden hair, the budding beauty which had awakened the covetousness of the respectable millionaire, to woo her to his frosty breast!

Not even a separate grave for the loveliness for which the scheming mother had plotted and won a sumptuous palace!

CHAPTER II.

UNDER SHELTERING WINGS.

It was an awful moment for Bessie when she felt her protector's hold torn from her; she was swayed backward and forward in the surging crowd, and finally found herself swept out of the main current and stranded between two rows of chairs, almost or quite alone. Her sobs and shrieks were strangled in her throat by the scorching air and smoke; a dull glare was around her; she seemed utterly cut off from hope of escape. The life she had wearied of grew very sweet in that awful moment's agony. She cast wild glances to right and left and overhead, running she knew not in what direction, as she scanned her surroundings.

Was that a door? Thank God, yes! and a woman hurrying through it. Bessie followed. She found herself in a dark passage, whose coolness was heaven after that heat and smoke. The woman was before her; she could not see her, but she knew it must be so, and ran after her. The relief might be only temporary; they

might have caged themselves in a dreadful trap only to perish the more certainly! but she ran on, there was nothing else to do.

The moments stretched themselves into seeming hours. Bessie appeared to herself to have lived days of doubt, fear and anguish, before she saw a glimmer of the outer air, reached a door, stood free and unharmed under the midnight sky—saved—saved!

She scarcely thought to look back at the burning building, the rushing firemen just gathering to the scene; with the instinct of the bird that flies to its nest she ran toward her home.

Breathless, with trembling limbs and wildly-beating heart, she reached the steps and fell down upon them in a half-swoon. No one chanced to be in the street at the time.

Unable, from the weakness caused by her frightful experience, to arise for some minutes, before she could do so a sudden inspiration came to her, almost like a voice from Heaven. It said:

"You loathe this man you have married; your soul shrinks from the union of your young life with his; here is a wonderful—a providential means of escape from that which you hate. He will think you died in yonder blazing building. He will never dream otherwise. Fly from him! *Fly from him!* You will have to give up your mother; but she has been cruel to you. Fly—fly—fly, while there is yet time! It is better than the river. It is better than the fire. Hurry, hurry, and you may be free from your persecutors!"

New life entered into Bessie's fainting heart and body. She arose and hurried on—away from the home of her childhood—away from the mother who had forced her into a mercenary marriage—away from her past life—her dreaded future—away from everything—where?

She did not know. She flew along the deserted streets. It was a surprise to her when she found herself on a Fulton ferryboat. There were only a few passengers, and she shrunk into the quietest corner, wishing she could be invisible for once; the sight of a young, lovely girl, richly dressed and all alone, must needs excite unpleasant comment.

She had been seated a short time—the boat had not moved out of its slip—when two women got up from seats on the opposite side of the cabin, crossed over and stood before her.

"Bessie Britton! What in the world! Are you alone?"

Bessie raised her heavy, frightened eyes and recognized a girl of about her own age—a school-friend whom she had not met for a year or two, since the latter had gone from Brooklyn to reside in Harlem—and her mother.

"Edith, is that you? and dear Mrs. Harland, how glad I am!" and then Bessie broke down into sudden tears.

"Don't ask me a word quite yet," she sobbed. "I will tell you everything as soon as I can. Mrs. Harland, may I go home with you, just for this one night? I am in great trouble. May I stay with you and Edith?"

"Certainly, my child. I am sorry you are in trouble. Here! take this waterproof cloak—I have my shawl which will answer me—and cover up your elegant dress, Bessie; then we

shall be a quiet party, not attracting attention."

"Thanks, dear Mrs. Harland," sobbed the girl, as motherly hands laid the dark cloak over her shoulders. "Bring the hood up over my head, please; I do not wish any human being but you two to see my face to-night. Oh, I am so glad to meet you, of all others! What would I have done?"

Mrs. Harland and her daughter—who had visited Brooklyn to see a relative who was ill and were late in returning—were keenly surprised and curious, to find Bessie Britton here on a ferryboat at midnight, alone, and dressed with a richness far beyond her mother's means. They had not the key to the mystery and their conjectures were wide of the truth.

She told them, in tremulous, hurried, horrified whispers, of the burning theater, and how she had barely escaped from it. This explained her distracted appearance, but not the reason of her being on the ferryboat instead of going home.

"Who was your escort?" queried Mrs. Harland.

"Ah, I will tell you all, when I get to your house," murmured Bessie. "There is so much to tell—and you may think my present course all wrong. I hope you will pity and shelter me, even if you do not approve my conduct. Indeed, it seems to me that Heaven has sent you to save me—for, what *should* I have done had not you and Edith been on this boat?"

A few more passengers came on board. Bessie drew the ugly hood close about her beautiful face, so that only the morning-glory eyes, the delicate nose, the two sweet lips were visible; but a young gentleman who, in company with a young lady, was just then passing her to take seats not far away, noticed the exquisite fairness of the little hand and dimpled wrist put up to hold the hood together—noticed the diamond bracelet flashing on the round white arm—noticed the blue, blue eyes, the long lashes, the budding mouth, so deliciously fresh and child-like, and, had not his own sister been on his arm, would have liked nothing better than to have attempted to win at least a look of interest from this beautiful young girl. He placed himself so that he could watch her; he would have begun one of those harmless flirtations in which the young people of to-day engage as a passing amusement; only the beauty in the sheltering waterproof never once glanced at him.

"I wish, Viva," he said to his sister, "that girl would take off that hideous hood! I am dying to have a better look at her. She has the very loveliest eyes I ever saw!"

"You declare that, every day, of some new beauty, Roy Doubleday," declared his companion, with a light laugh. "I fear you are far too susceptible."

"Roy Doubleday!" Bessie started, barely suppressing a cry, as she heard that name spoken. So! this must be the "only son" of whom she had heard, named after his father, Le Roy Doubleday. She looked at him, now, with eager interest, forgetting for a few seconds her fear of discovery; this young gentleman had never seen or heard of *her*, and was therefore in no danger of recognizing her should in-

quiry after her be made. Their eyes met, and his bold glance of admiration made hers fall; but she had seen enough to know that he was her girlish beau-ideal of all that is winning in the opposite sex. The fire of his dark eyes thrilled every vein, as eyes had never before thrilled her. What an air of grace and ease and joyous, careless youth he bore! How handsome he was! What a smile he had! Bessie dared not look again, but the image of this youth was printed on her heart as indelibly as if she had gazed for hours.

The girl of seventeen had never been in love; yet she had dreamed of what love was like; and now his first melting, delicious touch was laid upon her soul. If it had been *this* man who had wooed and won her, what perfect bliss to have known herself his choice—his wife!

But, alas! she was bound by solemn, lawful vows to that selfish old man, his father. What had she done? Sold, for a mess of pottage, her sweet inheritance of hope and joy!

"Oh, mother, mother! Oh, mother, cruel, unnatural mother!" she sobbed, under her breath, "you forced me to it! But I have escaped. He shall never find me. I will starve; I will work my fingers to the bone, before either of you shall dream that I still exist, alone in this wretched world."

"Perhaps *he* is dead! Perhaps he did not escape!" she thought, with sudden hope, and then shuddered that she had been guilty of such a hope:

"I do not wish his death, although he has been so cruel to me. I am not a murderess in my thoughts. I pray he has escaped; but that he may never surmise I, also, live."

The boat grated and bumped against the bridge; the passengers hurried off. As Bessie, clinging to Edith, passed out on the pavement, to take a car for the upper part of the city, she noticed Roy Doubleday handing his sister into a carriage; he saw her, and lifted his hat, as to an acquaintance.

It was naughty of him, and she would not appear to be aware of the act, yet again that thrill ran warm and sweet through all her being—for this man, this man only, of all in the world, had gained the power to command the heart that beat in her bosom to own him master: this man, the son of that other dreaded one who had the legal right to call her wife!

"Why, if he only knew it, I am his step-mother!" thought poor Bessie, and at that absurd idea, she fell into wild laughter, which alarmed her two companions, who saw that she was on the verge of a fit of hysterics. Her forced composure had broken down at last—the terrible strain of that whole long day—and she was laughing and weeping on Edith's shoulder.

They hurried her into the car, and were glad enough when the tedious ride to Harlem was at last accomplished. By that time, Bessie was calm again—worn out—quiet from very exhaustion.

Seated in the modest parlor of Mrs. Harland's suite of rooms in a third-class apartment-house, and refreshed by a glass of wine, the persecuted girl hastily told the story of her mother's determination that she should marry her wealthy old suitor—of her dislike and refusal—of the

course pursued to force her final consent—of the marriage which had taken place only that afternoon—the visit to the theater which followed—the awful calamity of the fire—her separation from her companion—and her present irrevocable decision to conceal her escape from her husband and mother.

"I want you, dear Mrs. Harland, to keep me here safe with you. You will be a mother to me, and I will be prudent and obedient to your advice. You are not like my mother! *you* would never drive Edith into such misery! nor will I be a burden on you. I can earn money in some way, if I have the opportunity to try. Meantime, I will sell this finery, which I detest, because *he* forced it upon me," pointing to her bracelets and the large, fine solitaire glittering in one of the rings on her pretty hand. "I can paint on satin and silk; my teacher says I do it exquisitely. Oh, you will see, how little trouble I will make and how much I will love you, dear, dear Mrs. Harland, if you will keep me and hide me away from them all!"

And the motherly woman kissed a tear off the soft pale cheek of the poor little runaway bride, and promised to be her friend—to give her shelter and never to betray a knowledge of her existence should she be questioned.

Indeed, there was small danger of the Harlands being questioned; they had never been intimate friends; the elder ladies had never met; there was only a school-girl friendship between the young people. Harlem was a long way off from Brooklyn.

Nor, to the distracted, conscience-stricken mind of the unhappy mother, did it seriously occur that her daughter had escaped the frightful doom which it was fully believed had overtaken her.

So, at least for a time, Bessie was safe. Sold for gold, she had slipped the chain which bound her to her millionaire master, and was left to tremble and crouch in her hiding-place.

CHAPTER III.

A FATEFUL ERRAND.

VIVA DOUBLEDAY, with her maid's help, was trying on her New Year's reception costume. Viva was a slender, dark, graceful young lady, with beautiful, brilliant eyes, a rich velvety complexion and a proud manner. She had always been petted to the point of spoiling, yet she was very amiable to those she loved.

Her New Year's dress was, of course, a matter of the highest importance. She had chosen it with care. A lovely tint of azure satin, the very shade which is more becoming to pale, clear brunettes than even to blondes. This satin had been given out, weeks before, to be hand-painted in exquisite sprays and vines of wild-roses and field daisies. It had come home, that morning, from the aristocratic house where it had been made up, perfect in fit and finish. Now, as she stood before the long mirror, regarding herself in it, Viva, by accident, swept from its place a bottle of perfume, which, in falling, deluged the apron-front of the delicate satin and made sad havoc with the dainty colors of the painted flowers.

"I have ruined my dress!" she cried, almost

with tears. "It will never be fit to wear! Flora, what shall I do? There is no time to order another, and I *won't* wear one I have worn before, if I have to stay in bed all New Year's Day!"

"It is only the apron, miss; perhaps madame can get another done in time."

"Never! There are but two days, and all her employees are hurried to death. The girl who did this painting has made more promises than she can fulfill. What *shall* I do?"

"I'm sure madame will do anything to oblige *you*, Miss Doubleday."

Miss Doubleday stood, lost in thought, a full minute.

"Flora, is Mr. Roy in the house?"

"I thought I heard him at the piano a little while ago, miss."

"Go see. Ask him to come to me."

Presently in comes her brother—bright, careless, gracious.

"Roy, will you do an errand for me? Of course I can send Flora, or go myself, but *you* have the most influence. You were born for a diplomat, Roy, and here is a chance to distinguish yourself." She ran on, explaining the accident to her dress and begging him to visit madame immediately and induce her to repair the injury.

"Use all your fascinations, Roy," she pleaded, as earnestly as if the fate of a nation depended on his influence; and the brother, who adored his handsome sister, promised to do his best.

The result of his interview with madame was the assurance of the impossibility of the new apron-front being painted by the same artist who did the first.

"I have the card here, however, of a young woman, to whom, as yet, I have given no work; but the specimens of her skill which she showed me were perfectly satisfactory. Here is the satin, and here is her card. If Miss Doubleday will send her maid, it may be this person can do the work in time."

Roy took the little bundle and the address. The picture of Viva's distress moved him; he had nothing in the world to do; it occurred to him that it would expedite matters if he sought out the artist himself and persuaded her to haste. Anything to oblige Viva. He looked at the card.

"I'm in for a good long pilgrimage," he said to himself, yawning. "Never mind! it will make the time to luncheon shorter. 'Miss Black'—doesn't suggest much, but I hope the fair painter will be amiable and unemployed."

He felt very much bored indeed before the horse-cars arrived in front of that particular number of that particular street written down on Miss Black's card.

"No. 4, third floor."

Up he went, two stairs at a time, like some India rubber errand-boy—this fastidious, idle, aristocratic Roy Doubleday—and knocked at the door indicated.

A small servant-girl of some fourteen summers (and winters) opened it and stood staring in wild admiration at the beautiful young gentleman who confronted her.

"Is Miss Black in?"

The girl hesitated, looked at a young lady sitting over by a sunny window of the little parlor, and answered—

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. That's her," making a jerky motion with her thumb, "but I don't know as she wants to be in, sir."

The young gentleman laughed—how could he help it?—or the young lady, either, as she arose and faced him.

"I come, for my sister, who would like to persuade you to do some work for her—immediately—" and there young Doubleday came to a full pause and looked, with his bold, handsome eyes, at the girl who faced him, as if she had dazzled him.

There were girls, "in his set," wonderfully beautiful and stylish—choicest buds of high-bred hot-house, bloom such as the most exacting man might be proud to win and wear—but this critic of womanly charms, had never before seen a face and form like *this*! *This* girl was a revelation to him!—a revelation of how lovely a perfectly lovely child-woman of seventeen can be. Was it the sun streaming in the window, or only her gold hair, that made the place so bright? Was Heaven in that room or only the deep blue of those eyes? Had summer come with its roses, or was it the blush which rose in her cheeks which made him think of them?

As for Bessie, thus surprised by him, she turned very pale and then flushed like a rose from head to foot. He did not recognize her for that girl on the ferryboat wrapped in a waterproof, but she knew him at a glance, while joy and fear both ran like lightning through her frame—joy at seeing him; fear that, in some way, he knew who she was and what she was to his father.

Had he come there to denounce her? to spy upon her?

It happened that both Mrs. Harland and Edith were absent from the house. Oh, what had brought him, of all men, there? and she alone!

"The front of my sister's New-year's dress has been ruined by an accident; do you think you can copy it on this fresh satin by four, to-morrow afternoon, Miss Black?"

"I have no doubt of it, sir, if not too elaborate."

Commonplace words, quietly spoken. They did not betray the agitation into which the young man had been thrown by the unexpected sight of so much girlish loveliness; nor the only half-banished fear in her mind that, after all, this errand might be a pretext for seeing her, and making known her existence to those from whom she most desired to hide it.

He handed her the little package of satin.

"What is the subject?" she asked, trying bravely to steady her voice.

He drew, from the capacious pocket of his ulster, the ruined apron, held it up, laughed easily.

"You see, wild roses and daisies."

"Yes, it will be easy to copy them. I can promise you the work shall be done by noon to-morrow. Where shall I send it?"

"Don't send it! Let me come for it!" Their eyes met; his, blazing with the admiration, which he felt no desire to conceal; hers, pure,

childish, but faintly troubled by that suspicion that he might know who she was and why she was hiding here.

"Can I see some of your painting?" he asked her, as an excuse for delay. It seemed to him there was no spot in the world so attractive as that sunny room.

She showed him a spray of eglantine on a banner of white silk, which she had just been working at. As she handed it to him the sun light fell on a large diamond on her finger, which blazed and sparkled marvelously. Roy felt a jealous pang go through his heart; surely that must be an engagement ring! She saw his glance rest upon it, and blushed again, more deeply than before.

How glad she was that the hateful wedding-ring was hidden in a drawer of her work-box! And how imprudent it had been of her—a poor girl—to continue to wear this costly diamond! What would Roy Doubleday think of her?

She did not wear it often; but Bessie loved beautiful things, and that morning she had come across the ring in the bottom of her collar-box, and had put it on, to flash in the light while she drew and painted the spray of eglantine.

"Is this for sale, Miss Black?"

"Certainly, sir, if you like it."

He laid a twenty-dollar gold piece on the table, folded the silk and put it in his breast-pocket.

"The money pays for the apron, also," says Bessie, gently. "Thank you; and now I will go immediately to work upon it, so that your sister shall not be disappointed. If you will leave me the address, I will send the work home the first hour in which I can complete it."

How delicately she dismissed him, at the same time refusing as delicately all excessive pay for her painting, and ignoring his request that he might call for the parcel.

The spoiled darling of a world above her own was forced to beat a retreat from that sunny room, bowing low in true deference to this glorious young creature; he felt, when the little servant had shut the door between them, as if he had left his heart behind him.

All day he dreamed of his little adventure.

"What in the world is the matter with you, Roy?" cried Viva, at dinner, as he allowed his venison, to grow cold in its bath of currant jelly, while his eyes dwelt thoughtfully on a half-opened rose in the *epergne*. "Look—look, papa, Roy is actually blushing!"

Mr. Doubleday turned his cold gray eyes on his son:

"What girl are you spoiling your dinner for, now, Roy?" he asked, with pleasant sarcasm.

"I don't spoil many dinners, do I, father? You sometimes wish I were more serious in my views of the young ladies. Let me see—a month or two ago, you actually suggested to me, that I should marry and settle down. How would it please you, now, if I married a poor girl—one who actually uses her talent to support herself—in short, the young artist who is repairing the damage to Viva's dress?"

"Nonsense! But you love to talk nonsense!"

"Don't be afraid of it, papa! Roy is the most exclusive young gentleman on this avenue."

Nothing short of the Princess Beatrice will satisfy him!" laughs his sister.

"This girl is more than a princess—she is the very Queen of Beauty," rejoins Roy, still dreamily regarding the most perfect rose in the bouquet. "I declare, when I entered her presence, I was overpowered! There *are* beautiful women in these days, after all!"

"Thank you," says Viva, pouting; "I am surprised."

"Oh, you are pretty enough, Viva—charming—and all that!—but this Miss—Miss Black—is not at all your style. Gold hair—real gold hair, like sunbeams, and a world of it—blue eyes, true blue, deep as the sea and pure as heaven, with large white lids deeply and softly fringed; a face like a baby's for dimples and fresh, fair tints, yet full of character;—lips!—well, it would be worth a man's while to kiss *such* lips!—a little supple, slender, rounded figure— Father, what's the matter with *you*? John, pour some wine, quick, for my father!—Great heavens! how pale you were! I thought you were in for a dead faint, sure!"

"It's nothing, Roy, nothing at all. I got very cold this afternoon, and this room is entirely too warm. John, how often must I tell you that one does not dine comfortably in a room up to eighty? Open a door, or window, or another bottle of claret, or something! Go on with your thrilling description of this Miss—"

"Black."

"—Black's beauty. I find you're in earnest, to judge from your eloquence. It's a pity you did the errand for Viva; you are far too impressive, my son! Give me her address and I will go for the satin to-morrow, and judge for myself, of your taste in these matters."

Father and son looked in each other's eyes for an instant. Each was smiling, and had on a jesting air, but Roy had no idea of allowing any other man—even his father—a glimpse of the charming beauty he had discovered; while the old man's veins were throbbing with a wild, sudden, fierce thought—the description was so *exactly* that of his young wife!

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF LEADING STRINGS.

DOUBLEDAY, senior, was too cunning to betray further to his children the terrible excitement which disturbed him.

He would not even ask again for the young artist's address.

"I can get it of madame, unknown to them," he thought. "I *must* see this girl! Can there be another in the world so like my Bessie?—and she painted flowers, too! I remember how she said to her mother, pleading not to be compelled to marry for money, that she would no longer be a burden to her—that she could support herself by painting. Yes, that makes the proof stronger! That girl escaped from the burning theater, after all, and is hiding from me! I have had my remorse and regrets for nothing! I will make her pay for them, the little termagant! Confound her, what is there about me so disagreeable? I am far from an old man yet! There are a dozen of girls on this very avenue who make eyes at me every day—

who would be only too happy to become Mrs. Doubleday, and mistress of this elegant house—a carriage—an opera-box. I don't understand how the little fool can be so blind! If there had been a rival—but there was none.—How curious it is that the more she flouted me the more I admired her. Now, if she really has played me this trick! I shall not sleep a wink to-night. I hope that boy of mine does not fall in love with her! It would be just like him!—a pretty climax to the affair *that* would be! By George, it is too absurd for anything! Yet I am mortally afraid of it. The only thing to be done is for me to satisfy myself, to-morrow, who this Miss Black is. I *must* contrive to see her! Should it be Bessie, I will nip the young man's dream in the bud, by confiding to him the fact that the golden-haired beauty is his father's wife! *That* will crush the romance out of him pretty effectually! Perhaps then he will be induced to turn his attentions where they belong—to the pretty heiress across the way, with her black eyes and her half-million dollars. *There's* a match for my son, such as he ought to make. And when I bring my wife home, he will be anxious to marry and get out. My wife!—here I am thinking of her as alive and found, when, after all, this Miss Black may turn out to be—only Miss Black."

The carriage came around to take the Doubledays to the Academy of Music; but the father did not care to go out.

"Step across the street, Roy, and ask Miss Verplanck to take my place. She will be better company."

Miss Verplanck was quite willing to go with Roy Doubleday as an escort. He stood in the hall of her mother's house, hat in hand, waiting for her to get her hat and gloves and cloak.

She looked very handsome as she came downstairs, the daintiest of opera-bonnets resting on her dark hair, a white plush cloak partially concealing her rich dress, a soft glow of pleasure on her smooth cheeks—for Paula Verplanck loved Roy Doubleday as much as it was in her nature to love anybody besides her dainty self. She gave him a witching smile as she placed her warm, gloved hand in his arm to be escorted to his carriage.

Meantime, the little party of young people were no more than fairly out of sight before Mr. Doubleday had donned overcoat and hat and set out to interview madame, his daughter's dressmaker, to obtain the address of the Miss Black who had so excited his hopes, on the pretense to the lady that his son had lost the card, and the work must be sent for on the morrow—his daughter was so anxious, he had volunteered to come for it himself. Of course madame complaisantly furnished the required information, and with the address in his pocket-book he returned home, burning with impatience for the time to come when he could assure himself of the truth or falsity of his suspicions. The old broker had learned craft and caution in Wall street.

Bessie's golden head, nestled on its innocent pillows, was full of dreams of her visitor—girlish dreams of ardent admiration, a little darkened by fear that it was not accident entirely which had brought about their meeting.

How would her poor little heart have quaked with terror could she have known how innocently the young man had betrayed her identity to his father by his very praises of her!

How would she have arisen in the morning and clothed herself in some fresh disguise and fled from her kind protectors could she have known of the steps already taken by the one who had a right to claim her, to assert that claim!

All her security had been in the great fact that her husband believed her dead. Once let him get a hint that she was living, she knew she would be hunted down remorselessly by this rich, determined man.

As Bessie lay and pondered the possibility of danger she resolved that if Roy Doubleday called again she would not see him; but to prevent his calling she would arise as soon as it was light, complete the task and send the work home before eleven o'clock so that he could have no excuse for coming.

She wanted to see him—oh, *how* she wanted to see him again! It was a cruel privation to refuse the opportunity, but she decided that she dare not run the risk; and so with a wonderful firmness she afterward carried out her plan.

At eleven the following morning Edith Harland set out with the little package, to deliver it to its owner in Fifth Avenue.

Bessie also begged Mrs. Harland not to leave her a moment alone, and to say to any one who asked for Miss Black that she was not at home. Indeed, going still further in her precautions, she arranged that—if an elderly man should call—Edith should pass as the artist, and thus, perhaps, throw Mr. Doubleday off the course, should he be following a suspicion that she was Miss Black.

Edith had been gone perhaps half an hour when a knock sounded on the parlor door. Bessie, turning pale as a white rose, softly stole into her bedroom and as softly turned the key. Again the little servant opened the outer door, expecting to see the same handsome gentleman who had given her a dollar yesterday; but no, this was an older personage, whom Mrs. Harland, inwardly trembling, immediately arose to receive.

In a moment, Bessie, with her ear glued to the key-hole, while every drop of blood in her veins turned cold, heard the dreaded voice—the smooth, courteous voice she hated:

"I beg your pardon, madam, if I intrude, but my daughter desired me to call to see if the painting is finished that was promised yesterday—part of a dress, I believe. Can I see Miss Black and obtain the article?"

"My daughter left with it, half an hour ago, for your house?"

The eyes of her visitor were roaming restlessly about; the look of disappointment visible on his eager countenance when he first entered, deepened.

"Ah, is that so? I might have spared myself quite a little journey. Miss Black is your daughter, then?"

She bowed, without speaking. Mrs. Harland objected to telling a falsehood, but she felt bound to protect that trembling creature on the other side of the bedroom door.

"My son tells me that she paints delightfully. Will you show me some of her work, Mrs. Black?"

This was evidently to gain time; the gentleman had made up his mind to sit there until the young lady returned.

Deeply embarrassed and uneasy, Mrs. Harland produced a sketch-book in which Bessie had designed a few groups of flowers, ferns and grasses. She trembled for fear the unhappy girl might somewhere have scribbled her name carelessly.

Her visitor took his time in studying the pictures.

Finally, he said:

"I trust I am not annoying you; but I like the artist's work so much, I would like to remain until her return, for I desire to give an order, and to explain to her, personally, just what I would like her to paint for me. I dare say she will be home soon?"

Mrs. Harland glanced at the clock and murmured yes.

An embarrassing silence fell between them, broken by another knock at the door. The broker looked eagerly toward it; the little maid was in the kitchen and Mrs. Harland opened it—enter, Roy Doubleday, junior.

"Well, really! *you* here, father!" he exclaimed in surprise, as he caught sight of the gentleman with the sketch-book, who colored high, but forced a laugh as he answered:

"I guessed you would be here to-day, so I came to judge for myself and to see you safely home."

"Thanks; I believe I am out of leading-strings, father!"—how proudly he said it and how the little heart behind the locked door beat with fear and joy as she heard his rich tones. "Well, did I exaggerate?"

"I have not yet had the opportunity to decide."

Both of them looked about with rather a blank air.

Poor Mrs. Harland was perfectly distracted; she now expected Edith every moment. On her arrival the younger man would, of course, betray the fact that this was not the artist—the elder one would know that she had attempted to deceive him. What *could* she do? She knew how Bessie must be watching and shivering and praying; she had learned to dearly love the sweet, affectionate girl; not for worlds would she willfully betray her. What *could* she do?

The elder man, restless and embarrassed, arose and looked out of the window on the busy scene below; she hastily scribbled in her little expense-book, and held the page toward the son, who read:

"It is *my* daughter who is coming. Say nothing to your father. Come later and we will explain."

Roy looked from this curious message at its writer; he saw that she was frightened, nervous and very much in earnest. There was a mystery somewhere he did not comprehend, but he nodded assent to those imploring eyes, not at all displeased to realize that, at all events, he had been invited to come again!

At that instant the door from the hall opened

and in comes a young lady—very pretty in her way, certainly, petite, with blue eyes and flaxen hair—but no more like the glorious young creature whom he saw yesterday than the field daisy is like the “queen rose.” His father looked, too, and the flush in his face subsided and the eager flash died out of his eyes.

Edith was a good deal startled to suddenly find two such pairs of devouring eyes fixed upon her; she blushed, and glanced inquiringly at her mother:

“The gentleman to whose house you went with the dress, my dear. He wishes to give you another order, I believe.”

“I shall be glad to have it,” says the girl, taking the hint quickly, and turning to the elder man, whose enthusiasm had suddenly vanished, but who asked for a group of ferns and grasses in a mechanical way; she named a modest price, and then both gentlemen bow and take their departure.

“Well,” says the father, bringing to a close a long whistle which has absorbed his breath down the two flights of stairs, “I cannot dream you are in any great danger from that source! I thought you hypocritical, my boy; I was really alarmed at your enthusiasm yesterday—didn’t know but that I was to have a poverty-stricken beauty foisted upon me as a daughter-in-law—but *that* young lady! Roy, I gave you credit for better taste!”

“She doesn’t look half so pretty to-day, father, that is true. I must have been under some sort of glamour. If so, the spell is broken. I prefer Miss Verplanck to this beauty, decidedly. However, it strikes me, it’s curious business for my father to undertake! Were you going to cut me out, or to warn the lovely party that you would have none of her?”

Again the broker colored under his son’s clear gaze; again he attempted to cover his confusion by a laugh.

“I hardly know, my boy; I think I must have wanted to see for myself if she were one of those artless adventuresses; and then, you know, we go a great ways to look at a fine picture, so why not at a fine woman? I imagined something marvelous!—bah, you have disappointed me!”

Roy bore the imputation against his good taste without flinching. He felt that he could afford to. His father had not seen *her*—and he, himself, was to be permitted another visit! He was in excellent spirits during the tiresome ride in the street cars—when he had lunched and shaken off his too affectionate parent, he would complete the adventure of the day.

To see *her* again! His heart throbbed high at the very thought of it. He was astonished at himself—did not understand why he should be so deeply moved.

This young man of the world, flattered, followed, had prided himself on his invincibility. No woman could give him the heart-ache! He knew them and their ways! Yet here he found himself feverishly impatient for the hour when he might look again into those morning-glory eyes—wildly eager for the meeting with this young girl, so much beneath him in station, yet toward whom he entertained sentiments of the most chivalrous respect.

Ah, Roy, Roy, that coat-of-mail is pierced at last by one of those shafts of the busy archer whose wounds never heal, except under the kisses of the loved one’s lips! Doubt—deny—but it is so!

It will be proved to you by the bitterness of the disappointment which is awaiting you, as you hasten back in answer to that invitation of Mrs. Harland’s—hasten to meet her and her daughter, but not the one you cared to meet.

CHAPTER V.

FROM THE DIAMOND-MINES.

A PASSENGER was sailing into New York harbor on that December day which preceded the burning of the Brooklyn theater, and which saw a helpless girl forced into a hated marriage by an ambitious mother, who sought ease and luxury for herself and a life of fashion and splendor for her beautiful child. He came in on one of the British steamers, had his baggage sent to the Astor House, engaged a room there for a week, had a bath, saw the barber, changed his traveling attire for a comfortable suit of English business clothes and was ready for dinner some time before it was served.

His name, as registered, was plain George Darrow; and he was a plain, yet by no means common, looking man; about fifty, slightly gray, an intelligent face and the perfectly quiet, self-possessed manner of one who has traveled much and is at home any and everywhere. Indeed, there was an expression of power in his resolute countenance which was felt even by the hotel-clerk when he assigned one of his best rooms to this gentleman.

As the traveler stood looking out of his window at the Park opposite, he muttered to himself:

“In fifteen years everything changes—this busy city as much as anything. There are plenty of new hotels, with sounding names, far up the street, but this suits me best. I am used to it—it looks familiar and substantial. I will make it my stopping-place until I resolve on what to do. Perhaps I am a fool ever to have returned to this country, after being driven from it by disgrace and calamity that would have killed a weaker man. Why have I come? I hardly know. Only it is hard for a man when he feels himself beginning to grow old, to live in a foreign land; he pines to be at least buried in his own country. I am rich—those diamond-mines in Africa fully retrieved my many failures—I can live as I please—build or buy a home—but ah, my God, how lonely I am!”

For a moment he buried his face in his hands while something very like tears burned in the clear gray eyes unused to them, and oozed between the brown fingers; but soon he raised his head with a proud air, and smiled:

“Sentiment at my age! I thought Hetty killed all of that there was in me—killed it root and branch—long ago. I wonder if Hetty is alive! Not that it matters to me, only that I must use more caution to prevent recognition if she is. She must not dream of my return. I will take my time to discover her whereabouts and what sort of life she has led:

“And now, I feel that I have been tossed

about the world long enough. I want a home. I am able to have one to my liking—and to-morrow I will set about the pleasant task of selecting one."

After dinner the returned exile went out for a stroll. He was familiar with the locality; his steps turned toward Wall street, down which he walked, and, almost without design, found himself on the ferryboat, crossing the river.

He was not so utterly without emotion as he would have himself believe, for, as he found himself wandering around the once familiar streets of Brooklyn Heights, an emotion came over him which almost held his strong breath in its suffocating thrall.

But he had gone back to his hotel and was asleep in his bed when that terrible tragedy took place across the river. Had he known what was happening and who was in danger, there would have been no sleep for George Darrow that night, nor for many nights to come.

CHAPTER VI.

DRIVEN TO CONFESSION.

MRS. HARLAND found Bessie, after the two callers had left, so wild, pale and extremely nervous that she was alarmed.

"I must not stay here another hour!" the poor girl cried, wringing her hands. "He suspects—I could tell by the tone of his voice. Oh, am I never to have any peace in this world? How hard—hard—hard it is! Here I was, feeling so safe with you, dear Mrs. Harland, and doing so well in my efforts to earn my living, and now I must give everything up, and fly. I know not where! I shall never dare to take orders for painting again, yet, yet, what else can I do to earn money?"

"You must not leave us, Bessie. Where else can you be so safe?"

"You do not know that man; I am *not* safe here, a moment. His son is coming back, you tell me, perhaps this very day. Oh, I am wild with fear! Someway, the truth will be sure to come out. Not for my life, would I tell Roy Doubleday that I am his father's wife! Nor must you tell him. Whatever explanation you give, you must not betray my real name or that I am hiding from his father. Promise me!"

They were obliged to promise.

"And now, where can I go—what do? Let me look at the morning paper, please. Surely in this great city I can find something to do where I shall be safe and unsuspected."

"I don't know about that, my dear child. You are far too beautiful to go about alone, proud and pure and fearless of evil though you may be. This Christian city is spread with nets for the feet of those who are young and lovely, but poor and unprotected. I repeat my advice to you to remain with me. You need not see this young gentleman should he call again, nor need you go on the street for some time, or remain in the parlor if any one comes. I think I can take care of you."

"I know that you will be more than a mother to me, but I cannot longer feel safe here," and Bessie shivered as her glance roved around the room.

Her nerves were in such a state that Mrs. Harlan persuaded her to take a sedative and lie down in her little room.

"You must not go until to-morrow, at all events," she said, soothingly, to the trembling girl. "If the young gentleman comes he shall not know that you are in the house, unless you wish it. Go to sleep, my poor child, and know that I will take the best care of you."

"I know that I cannot sleep," cried Bessie, in an agony of unrest; "but I will stay here to-night, since you insist."

Hardly had she laid her throbbing head on the pillow when she heard that voice which was heavenly music to her ears, in the parlor close by. She sprung up and leaned forward to listen. Her very heart thirsted to catch every word—hungered for one more look at that adored face; but Bessie, if loving and impassioned, had more strength of character than most girls of her age; she knew that she ought not to love this man—ought not to run the risk of another meeting with him; and so she sat quietly on the edge of her couch, her small hands twisted together, her soft red lips pressed tightly, her blue eyes strained and feverish, making no move to break her resolution not to see him. Brave, brave little Bessie!

Meantime, Mrs. Harland was having quite a struggle with the disappointed admirer of Miss Black. He was determined, in his courteous but irresistible way, to know why Miss Black would not see him this afternoon—if he had offended her?—why she would not see his father when he came for the painted satin?—if she thought him no gentleman that she avoided him?

Then, finding all his persistence of no avail, he said at last, in tones which he could not keep from being a little tremulous with the deep feeling which possessed him:

"At least tell her, from me, Mrs. Harland, that my desire to form her acquaintance was from the purest and highest motives which can actuate the heart of man. If I had found Miss Black, after some further knowledge of her, one-half so lovely in mind and soul as she is in face and expression, I should have been too proud, too glad, to make her an offer of my heart, my hand, my fortune. I am forced to say this to you prematurely by her refusal to see me. Can it be that I have in any way alarmed or insulted one for whom I have only the greatest respect?"

Bessie heard every syllable of this last agitated speech; it proved too much even for her heroic resolution; the next instant the door of the bedroom quickly opened and the beautiful girl appeared before her visitor, a thousand times lovelier than ever, her blue eyes heavy with tears, and downcast; her cheeks flushing and paling, her little mouth quivering with pain:

"You have not offended me, Mr. Doubleday," she began, impetuously. "I cannot allow you to go away thinking *that*. I admire and honor you more than words can say. No! no!" shrinking back as he attempted to take her hand, "let me tell you something which I would rather die than tell to you, but which your words make necessary. Forget me—never try to see me again—I am not free to reciprocate your feelings—I am—I am—a *married woman*!"

"You!" he exclaimed, staring at her in blank amazement. "Why, I took you for a

very child!" Then, more sternly—"What right have you to call yourself *Miss Black*?"

"None—none!" shrinking under his accusing glance.

"I knew women were all alike—yet I have been deceived again," he said, bitterly. "The face of a child-angel and the heart of a married flirt!"

"You are too hard upon me," cried Bessie, sadly, looking full in his own with those tear-wet blue eyes. "I cannot bear to have you think so badly of me, Roy Doubleday. I could defend myself from your charges, if I would. I could prove to you that I have been far more sinned against than sinning."

"Prove it! prove it!" he said, quickly, making a movement to take her hand, which she put behind her as she drew a step back.

"No," she answered him. "You are not the one to whom I can tell my little history of wrong and persecution. You must

'Trust me, all in all, or not at all.'

The angels and my Father in Heaven know that I am innocent of any intended wrong—that I am the victim of a mother's worldly ambition and a rich old man's selfish admiration."

"How? Tell me all! Pray, pray, tell me all!"

"I cannot. But there is a gulf, deep as perdition, fixed between us, Roy, who were made for each other. Never think of me—never try to see me again!"

"You love me, too, then?" was all he said, and he asked it as eagerly as if he had not heard that fatal declaration that she was a wife.

"I *could* have loved you," she answered him gently, lowering those large, white lids over the sweetest eyes that ever shone on man.

"It is true—we *were* made for each other!" he cried passionately. "I see beautiful girls, every day; I know a hundred of my own rank, worthy of my love—but I never loved them—never felt as I did toward you the first moment I saw you."

"Too late!" sighed Bessie, "too late. It is sinful to say even that much. But, Roy, I cannot leave you feeling that you may despise me. I must tell you one thing more."

"What is that?" he asked, with breathless interest.

Bessie blushed until neck and forehead were one sweet color:

"I have never lived with the man my mother forced me to marry. The opportunity for escape from my hated bonds came to me within a few hours after the ceremony and I—fled: I am hiding from that man, now. For safety I assumed the name, *Miss Black*;—it is not my own. For safety, I avoid seeing strangers; and that is why Mrs. Harland, who befriends me, deceived your father this morning. I have to be very cautious and prudent. And so, I beg of you, if you are truly my friend, to come here no more—to give up the brief acquaintance entirely. Do it—please—for my sake!"

"You ask a hard thing, my darling, but I will strive to obey your wish—for the present. I do not deny that what you have just told me fills me with fresh hope. This old man cannot

live forever. You will be free, some day, my darling—and then, you and I will be happy, sweet."

"Don't talk so, Roy; you make me shudder."

"Where did you learn my name?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"And tell me yours."

"Not now—not yet! Mrs. Harland, pray, tell Mr. Doubleday that it is time he went away. Tell him how utterly impossible it is that I should see him again. Good-by—good-by!"

As she said these last words she turned and fled into her room.

"Is it true that I ought not to come here again, Mrs. Harland?"

"I fear it is too true. I am sure you wish to do no wrong—that the reputation of that unhappy girl is as dear to you as your own."

"Dearer! But, are you not at liberty to tell me more of her? Remember, I am bound to wait for her until that old scoundrel dies!"

The lady smiled rather sadly—

"That 'old scoundrel', sir, is a hale gentleman of sixty. You may have to wait twenty years."

"So be it, then—but I *shall* wait!"

Mother and daughter looked at the lover admiringly; here was a splendid devotion that won their favor. Edith sighed to think he was not hers instead of Bessie's; while Mrs. Harland assured him of her friendship, and that if anything occurred to change the situation she would certainly let him know.

He wrung their hands and went away, gloomy and despondent, little dreaming that this unknown husband, whom he detested, was his own father!

CHAPTER VII.

WANTED, A COMPANION.

GEORGE DARROW had purchased a house on Fifth avenue and furnished it. It was a beautiful house, decorated according to the latest ideas, and full of beautiful things. To preside over it, he had sent to Philadelphia and invited an old Quaker aunt to come on and live with him. She was the only relative he seemed to have—at least to care to claim, and she was a gentle, lovely dame, robed in the dove-colored Quaker garb, with the white kerchief folded over the prim bosom. She looked well at the head of his table; but she was little company for him, retreating to her own room after the six o'clock dinner, leaving him to his books and papers in the cheerful library.

There was no denying to himself the fact that he was lonely.

After being indifferent to society for fifteen years—after despising women, and dreaming of children only with deep sadness—his nature had reasserted itself, for George Darrow, was in his youth, a gay, social, light-hearted man, fond of ladies' companionship, and a passionate admirer of children.

This beautiful house, with its piano, its books, its pretty treasures of art and taste, seemed a wretched mockery of a home, with only himself. Aunt Dorothy, and the solemn-footed servants to occupy it. He thought the matter over for some time; and the result of his cogi-

tations appeared, one morning, in the daily papers, in the shape of the following advertisement:

WANTED—As companion to an elderly Quaker lady, a young lady of refinement. Must be a good reader and pianist, and of a cheerful temperament. Liberal salary to one who pleases. Apply at No. —, Fifth avenue.

This did not really suit the writer at all; he longed to add—"extreme youth, childlike gayety and good looks more an object than accomplishments,"—but as this might be misconstrued by a wicked world, he left it out.

What he desired was some one who would be like a daughter in his house; he had no thoughts of ever marrying, and he pined for youthful companionship, some one to laugh, to sing, to arrange the flowers on the table, to fly up and down stairs as if on wings, to flit like a butterfly about the rooms.

Bitterly did he repent ever putting that advertisement in the papers! For one whole week his life was a misery to him. He put upon his meek old aunt the trouble of dismissing the throngs who came in answer, but she would compel him to look at and talk to some of them—broken-down, consumptive-looking creatures trying to appear "cheerful," or bold and ancient ladies endeavoring to convince him of their childishness.

"Well, George, I guess thee has got what thee wants, at last," said Aunt Dorothy, on the seventh day. "There's a child in the library I feel my heart go out to; and if thee likes her appearance as well as I do, thee will engage her, without more ado."

Rather wearily Darrow proceeded to the library. Why, what was the matter with the room? The fire on the hearth was low, the day was cloudy, but—sunshine and warmth pervaded the place! The gold on the binding of the books glittered afresh; the blaze of the crumbling wood in the fire-place did its best to leap and laugh in cheery attestation of its pleasure. By the table, in the center of the room, stood a young lady—a child almost—not more than seventeen, if so much, with the loveliest, brightest face he ever beheld; such limpid blue eyes, such glittering golden hair, such an exquisite complexion, such a sweet blooming mouth, like some fresh flower! The first glance at her made this somber man think of the little daughter he had lost in her childhood, and who would now be the age of this beautiful girl, had she lived.

He went up to her and looked at her earnestly; she met his gaze with those pleading eyes:

"I do hope Miss Darrow will like me, and conclude to take me," said the girl, the tears rising in those large eyes; "for oh, I do need a home so much!"

"My sister does like you, and will take you," says Darrow, impulsively; "that is," he added, his prudence returning, "if you can give satisfactory references."

"I am afraid I cannot give you such references as I ought. I have run away from my home, not because I am a willful daughter, sir, but because my mother persecuted me. She wished me to—to—marry an old man for his money, and I did, but I ran away from both of

them. And I am obliged to hide myself from them. I tell you the whole truth, sir, so that you will understand why I desire to keep so quiet; and I do need a safe home so much. Miss Darrow looks like such a lovely, dear lady, it will be a pleasure to me to wait upon her. Ah, here she comes! Please say, Miss Darrow, that you are willing to give me a trial—just a week's trial! I will try so hard to please you."

"Thy sweet face pleases me, child, and I am minded to try thee, if my brother approve. What is thy name?"

"Bessie."

"Bessie; yes, but thy whole name?"

"Bessie Black, madam."

Both perceived that she hesitated over the "Black," and inferred that it was not her real name; but both also felt inclined to give her time to prove what she was, and to win her confidence in return.

The week of trial came to an end, and by that time the little household would no sooner have parted with Bessie than with their own eyes! The dullness had vanished from the fine house. It was home, now, even to the servants.

A lovely, laughing, gay young creature filled it with music and brightness.

There was a sad, steady ache down at the bottom of Bessie's heart: but she was paid by these people to be cheerful and amusing; and the young can not be quite miserable, whatever sorrows they may have—because the angel of Hope always remains by and comforts them.

She felt quite safe, too, in this great, well-protected house. No one would ever look for her—there! Certainly not. It was true that only two blocks below them, on the avenue, stood the residence of the Doubledays; this sometimes gave her a sense of dread; yet, the Darrows were strangers to the Doubledays—it was not probable they would meet—if they did, she could keep out of the way.

Her duties were of the very lightest; only those of a daughter of the house. Sometimes she read to Miss Darrow; in the evening, if he wished, she sung to the master. She arranged the flowers which Thomas cut in the conservatory; she embroidered and darned Mr. Darrow's socks.

As for the rest—must we speak of the hours she wasted watching, behind silken curtains, for Roy Doubleday to pass, as he often did, on the pavement below? Ah! she was happier than he, poor fellow! for she could sometimes catch a glimpse of him, and dream over it all night; while he only knew that he had lost her—that she had left Mrs. Harland's, and that even this good friend of hers did not have her address, although Bessie dropped her a little note almost every day, sending it to the general post-office, so that it could not be traced.

Yes, Bessie was faring far better than she could have hoped. She grew very fond of the lovable old Quakeress, and even of the grave, somber man, who inspired her with awe even while he won her warm affection.

"If he were my father, how I should adore him!" thought Bessie.

"If she were my daughter, I should have something worth living for!" thought the desolate wanderer of many years,

Bessie had been told that she gave satisfaction, and assured that she had a home as long as she cared to remain with the Darrows. Aunt Dorothy, noticing the meager wardrobe of the girl—ah, those beautiful bridal dresses Bessie had left behind with her mother!—had paid her wages in advance, and made her some valuable presents also. Everything promised at least rest and safety for the lovely runaway.

Yet Bessie had not been with the Darrows a month, when, one evening, about an hour after dinner, running lightly down the broad flight of velvet-covered stairs, on her way from her room to the library, she stood petrified in the lower hall, pale, gasping for breath, unable to move, to take a step of the sudden flight her fear urged upon her.

A gentleman was emerging between the heavy curtains of the library door; fortunately for her, he turned, as she stopped in her light advance, to speak to his host within:

"I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance, Mr. Darrow, and shall expect you to return my visit soon. We are neighbors, and like to continue so, as you have purchased, you tell me, and intend making this your permanent residence. I shall bring my son the next time I call; he will be deeply interested in your experience in the diamond-fields."

The elder Doubleday! No wonder the blood froze in his young wife's veins, nor that her feet refused to stir at her bidding. In a moment she would meet him face to face!

He was shaking hands with her employer; in another instant he would come forward and discover her, standing there, ready to be captured, like the bird that trembles, without power to fly.

He turns—he approaches, but his eyes are fixed upon the glove he is drawing on his fat white hand; by a desperate effort she breaks the icy spell of fear and darts along the hall toward the open doors of the dining-room, into which she rushes and sinks, quivering and breathless into a chair. The gas is turned down and there is no one to be astonished at her actions; Thomas is singing softly to himself in his butler's pantry, where he is wiping the glass.

The aristocratic broker, slightly startled by the sound of her flight, casts a glance that way, thinking to himself that his new neighbor might improve the manners of some of his servants—finishes buttoning his gloves, and departs through the door which John holds obsequiously open and closes softly behind him.

Bessie hears the door close and bursts into hysterical tears. Safe! for this once, but for how long?

If Doubleday is to become a visitor at this house, it can no longer be a refuge and shelter to her. She must leave these dear people—this lovely home—and go—where?—do what? How terrible it is to be in hiding; to have a perilous secret; to fear one's own mother; to dread the open day and the free sunshine!

"If I dared tell everything to Mr. Darrow I believe he would befriend and protect me. Yet, how do I know? Rich people are friendly to one another. Suppose he should take my husband's part against me? I dare not confide in him. No, it is settled—I must leave this home which I love so much."

CHAPTER VIII.

"NO FURY LIKE A WOMAN SCORNEO."

THE next day was a gusty, snowy February day. Bessie looked pale and unhappy; the hours glided drearily away; she dared not think of remaining much longer with the Darrows, yet she could not make up her mind to tell Aunt Dorothy she was going. What excuse could she give? She felt that they would be forced to suspect her of frivolity and duplicity, if nothing else; and the hot blood rose to her cheeks and the blinding tears to her eyes.

That afternoon Aunt Dorothy went out in the close carriage on an errand of benevolence; Mr. Darrow was down on Wall street on some business regarding investments; Bessie was quite alone in the great house, except for the servants.

She dressed herself for dinner—she dined with the family, and was, in all ways which she would permit, treated as a member of it—and crept down into the dim, rich drawing-room. She felt as alone in it as if she were in the wilderness, for John, knowing his master and mistress were out, would admit no callers should there chauce to be any. She walked restlessly up and down the soft, silent carpet for a long time, trying to think what to do, when she should leave this home.

All unconsciously she approached one of the windows looking on the street, and stood there, half in the shadow of the parted draperies, looking out into the nearly deserted street, where the snow crystals were at their wild play. It was not really snowing—only playing at it in gusty intervals; but the fair promenaders did not come forth that afternoon; few carriages even rolled along the quiet street; and so Bessie stood, utterly forgetful that *she* could be seen by any passer-by, until she was startled by some one pausing in his rapid walk directly before the window, and awoke from her reverie to find Roy Doubleday standing on the pavement staring up at her with a startled look.

With a little cry she shrunk back out of his sight.

The next moment she heard a resolute pull at the bell.

"He is coming in," she whispered.

Then she ran to the door, and cried to John in the hall:

"John, I am not at home to any one! Do you hear?"

He did not hear; he had already opened the door, and was answering the question put to him by young Mr. Doubleday, whom he knew well by sight.

"Was Miss Black at home? Why, yes, he believed so—"

John hesitated, because it was the first visitor Miss Black had had since she came there:

"Step into the parlor, Mr. Doubleday; I will see."

And so John opened the drawing-room door wide; and there stood Miss Black right before them; the visitor went up to her and held out his hand, and the servant shut the door upon them, surprised to discover that the elegant Mr. Roy and this young lady were old friends.

"Bessie!" cried Roy, with a movement to put his arms about her, which made her shrink away from him, though blush after blush broke

over her exquisite face. "Ah, you will not let me touch you! you shrink from me—you have forgotten me. Bessie, my God, can it be," he went on, as a thought struck him, "that this Darrow is the man who forced you into a marriage which you once told me was so hateful? Is *this* the way you keep faith with me?" bitterly, with a significant look at her silk attire and sumptuous surroundings. "Oh, girl, girl! and I put my faith in you!"

"It is you who have broken your faith, Roy. You promised not to follow, or seek an interview with me; yet you come to this house, where I am doing my duty as Miss Darrow's companion, and force yourself upon me. Of course John will tell my employers of your visit. What will they think? It is hard enough for me, without *you* making it harder!"

"Miss Darrow! your employers! Then you are not this rich man's wife? My father was telling me about him, and what a fine man he appeared to be. Forgive my hasty suspicions, and only remember how wretched I am—how I must feel, loving as I do, yet kept in utter ignorance of your whereabouts! Oh, it is a bitter time I am having! but I am glad I have found you out, sweet! I can look up at your window as I pass; and sometimes, you will give me a glimpse of you, will you not, my darling?"

He had gained possession of her hand and was kissing it; that he was in earnest, every look and word showed; that he had suffered, and that he was distracted with joy to be with her, even on these terms, was evident.

Bessie's heart throbbed with mingled misery and happiness. She longed to tell him her love—to let him see fully, how dear he was to her—to be imprudent for five reckless, blissful minutes; but she dared not give way to her feelings, for he was hard enough to keep in check, now:

"I am going away from here," she said, sadly, "as I left Mrs. Harland's, because I am afraid to remain longer. Your father—" here she paused—great heavens! she had nearly betrayed—and to *him*—what his parents was to her! She could have screamed at thought of what she had so nearly uttered:

"What of my father, Bessie; he was here last evening."

"Nothing, nothing," she cried, hurriedly. "But I hear you are engaged, Roy, to the beautiful Miss Verplanck, who lives opposite you. You see, I can be jealous, as well as you!"

This ruse to divert his attention succeeded; he laughed, happy to feel that he had the power to make her jealous.

"Her mother and my father would like to make the match, I believe, but Bessie, while one hope remains that you may some time be free to marry me, no other living woman can have the slightest influence over your lover's heart. Bessie, I wish I could believe that you cared as much for me!"

"I do, Roy! Wherever I am, whatever doing, however concealed from you, however driven from you by unhappy circumstances, living or dying, Roy, I shall be, in soul and heart and spirit, yours—only and all, yours! I promise it, and—there! I seal the promise with the first kiss I have ever given a man. Now go away,

before you make me trouble, Roy. Miss Darrow may return any moment. And never come again. I am determined to leave here within a few days."

He was very reluctant, but she compelled him to go.

"At least promise to drop me a note saying you are safe and well, after you leave here, Bessie."

"I dare not. If ever I am free, I will make up for my coldness now, dear Roy."

"I will tell John that you did some painting for my sister once, and that she wished you to do more, but you cannot, while here," said the young lover, as he lingered. "That will make my visit all right with him, and you can say the same thing, if questioned."

At last he went, and none too soon, for Miss Darrow's carriage drove up very soon after. Bessie thought best to mention young Double-day's call at once to her; and did so, with tolerable composure, explaining that she had painted on silk and sold her work before she came there.

"Thee must paint me a wreath on my new pin-cushion," said the old Quakeress kindly, patting the girl's velvet cheek, and Bessie kissed her withered one, and could not make up her mind to confess that she had thoughts of going away.

That evening Aunt Dorothy retired early, wearied with her afternoon's work, and Mr. Darrow asked Bessie to read to him an hour or two, in the library. His own eyes were as keen as ever they were—and very shrewd, keen eyes they had been—but he liked the soft, musical ripple of the child's voice.

Very, very fond of this little girl he was growing.

The thought of her ever leaving them was like a blow. He had already talked with Dorothy about the feasibility of formally adopting Bessie as his daughter, so that he could provide for her in his will.

As she sat reading to him, George Darrow gazed into the pleasant wood-fire, half-listening, while his thoughts went back to the unhappy history of his early life, before he left his native land for those long years of wandering.

His had been the wretched lot of some honest and devoted men—to be betrayed by the women they love and trust.

The sweet tones of the beautiful mantle-clock intruded themselves on the sweeter ones of the fair reader, striking nine. George Darrow came out of his reverie and began to listen to what the girl was reading. Just then, both heard the door-bell. Bessie turned pale and rose to her feet—

"Please let me go, Mr. Darrow; I do not want to meet any one to-night. May I go?"

"Certainly, child. However, I hardly think it will prove to be a caller. Wait a little and see."

Steps were heard approaching the door from the hall. Bessie, thinking only of the visitor of the previous evening, made a dart for another door, opening into the reception-room. This door was hidden by a long velvet curtain, behind which she passed, as John, opening the other one, said apologetically, to his master—

"I asked for her name, but she did not give it, only just followed me down the hall, so I hope you'll excuse me, sir."

Darrow looked sharply up. A woman had followed the man into the room; she turned and shut the door behind him, before she removed from her rich bonnet a thick veil in which she had wrapped her head and face.

She was a handsome, vicious-looking woman of forty.

"Oh, George, you are back!"

He arose to his feet and confronted her with a stern frown.

"What is that to you? Go away, out of this house, and never come here again! I will get the police to take you away, if you dare intrude upon me in my home."

"You have made your fortune, I hear; it looks like it; I wish you had lived like this in the old times. It's hard to have you come back and flaunt your money in my face!" she went on, looking covetously at the elegant surroundings.

"As for me, I'm poor as poverty. I've had a struggle to live ever since you went away. I've taken boarders, and drudged, to live an honest life. You might set that down to my credit, George. Oh, you needn't look at my clothes! I've earned every penny I gave for them, by the hardest. A woman has got to dress finely, nowadays, to be thought anything of. George, don't you think you've punished me enough? I've been a good woman since you left me; and it seems tough that you should be living here in style—lots and lots of money, I understand—and your poor wife be earning her living anyhow."

"You seem to forget that I have no wife; that I have a legal divorce, for good reason, from the woman I once called my wife. Don't take the liberty of calling yourself by that name," he said, scorn and disgust mingled in his tone.

There were no tears in the big, black, blazing eyes, but she put up the handkerchief, and began to whimper:

"You were always set and obstinate, and cruel," she sobbed. "You couldn't treat me worse if I were a dog. You were cruel to me then, George; you had no mercy on me! What did I do? I only told Stephen that I loved him better than I did you—that my parents had forced me to marry you, because you were well-to-do, and he was not. You couldn't forgive that, after playing eavesdropper at our meeting. You went and disgraced me by getting a divorce, and left me, after all, to take care of myself and our baby. I thought your heart might have softened toward me in all those years; you pretended to love me once," and she whimpered loudly.

"You cannot speak the truth yet, I see. Was that all I overheard between you and your lover? Could I have obtained a divorce on that? You pretended to love me, because you thought me richer than I proved to be; you made love to me, and I, blind fool, gave you my love and trust in return. I married you, and never husband honored a wife more, until my eyes were rudely opened to my own utter wretchedness and your base treachery. I left the woman I could not respect, without any legal necessity to furnish you one dollar. I yet

left you everything I had in the world, except money enough to take me away from the country which you had made hateful to me. I deeded to you our home, and placed five thousand dollars in bank to your order. I went away poor in everything. I had already spent on you, far beyond my means, thousands of dollars for the jewels and rich dresses you craved to set off your beauty. I went away, bankrupt in honor, hope, happiness and money. I became a wanderer over the earth. If I have rebuilt my fortunes, rest assured you will not share them. If the longing for country and home came strong upon me, after all these weary years, rest assured you had no place in my future. I hoped that you would never learn of my return. It seems that you have; and that you propose to dog me for money. Let me tell you, once for all, I shall hand you over to the police if you annoy me."

These were harsh words, but she who heard them knew full well how she deserved them. But the rage in her heart flamed up. She did not care for this man; not a thrill of tenderness stirred her heart as she met him who, in her youth, had been her trusting husband—but she coveted his wealth. If he refused her money she would have her revenge. A smile of exultation came over her handsome, wicked face as she remembered that she had power to torture him still.

"George," she said, "I will go away, quietly. You need not call the police. But, before I go, let me tell you that I lied to you in that letter I wrote you about our little girl."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE TOILS.

"WHAT do you mean?" he asked, taking a step toward her.

"I mean that I deceived you," she retorted, her great black eyes glowing with malice as she noted his repressed excitement. "If you want to know more, you will have to pay me well for my information."

"Did my child live? Do you mean that you lied about her death when you wrote me that she had died of scarlet fever?"

She laughed in his face as she retreated to the door, opened it and went out, saying, before she closed it:

"If you want to know about that, come and see me."

When she had shut the door between herself and him Darrow staggered back to his arm-chair and flung himself down, with a groan:

"She is lying to me, now," he said. "She doubtless told me the truth in her letter. She wishes to rouse my interest—to get me to commit myself by visiting her. Oh, but she is cunning and selfish! the same woman—heartless and artful—that I left behind me when I went away."

"I am not going to her house. I am not going to fall into her net! I pray God the child did not live!—for, what sort of a woman must she have grown to be, under such tutelage? I shall make no inquiries. I desire to know nothing. That woman must not seek to torment me. I had hoped, by appearing only under my mother's name, and avoiding all connected with

my old life, to escape recognition. Yet how soon that creature has found me out! Well, she must be quiet, that's all! I have made me a home, at last, and she shall not disturb it."

Leaning back in his chair he covered his eyes with his hands, all the sleeping wretchedness aroused in his breast.

Hark! what is that?—a sigh—a low moan.

Darrow springs to his feet and goes to the curtain which hangs between the two rooms. Bessie has not gone up-stairs; she is still lingering, leaning against the frame of the doorway. She must have heard every word spoken between his visitor and himself! He is angry with the girl, for the first time. He takes hold of her shoulder almost roughly. And then he finds that she is leaning there in a dead faint. He picks her up and places her on the library sofa, sprinkling the white face with ice water from a carafe on the table; she shudders as she opens her blue eyes, and looks about her wildly, fearfully.

When she finds that she is alone with Mr. Darrow she gives him a faint, strange, sweet smile.

"I am so glad it is only *you*," she murmurs.

"Did you hear what that woman said, Bessie? Ah, you know my sad story now, and it is just as well. I should have told it all to you some evening when we were sitting here together. You pity me, Bessie, do you not?"

"Oh, yes, I do pity you," answers the girl, a whole shower of tears gushing out of her troubled eyes. "But what must you think of me for listening? Forgive me! I did not intend it, but when I heard her voice a sort of horror came over me; I tried to move away, but I could not stir any more than as if I had been frozen there. I did not overhear much indeed, Mr. Darrow; I think I must have fainted. I will go to my room now."

"Are you able? Shall I not call my aunt's maid?"

"I had much rather go alone. See, I am well able to help myself. Good-night."

"Good-night, Bessie; I hope you will be well in the morning."

She turned at the door, and looking at her friend wistfully, with a world of affection in her sweet, troubled eyes, repeated her "Good-night," and went slowly away to her own pretty, luxurious room—not to sleep, oh, no; but to busy her aching brain with a hundred plans, all of them equally infeasible.

When the aunt and nephew sat down to their late breakfast the next morning, no blue-eyed Bessie brightened the meal.

"The child had an ill turn last evening; will you send to her room and inquire, Aunt Dorothy?"

A maid went to ascertain if Miss Black was coming down to breakfast, soon returning with word that she was not in her room; and then John admitted that she had gone out very early—when he was sweeping the steps at seven—telling him that her head ached and she was going to take a walk.

"Doubtless she will return soon. Eat thy breakfast, George, and don't worry about the child."

But Miss Darrow's own appetite was spoiled,

and that was a long, dreary day which followed, when Bessie did not return.

"Can I have been deceived in *her*, too?" Darrow asked himself, in heart-sick despondency. "The child seemed to me an earthly angel. If that fair face could deceive, then indeed do I refuse to have confidence in any human being."

He felt desolate, homesick, sorry that he had returned to America. Every hour, too, he expected another invasion from the bold visitor of last evening. Already his magnificent home was growing tiresome to him.

"Why did I not settle in England, down by Torquay, as I was minded to do?" he asked himself, impatiently.

Like many another mortal, Darrow could not see behind the cloud; did not dream that Providence had guided his choice, that sweet was to come out of this bitter.

Meantime Bessie, a long ulster buttoned over her pretty dress, and a thick blue veil wrapped about her hat and face, had stolen away, in the cold bright early morning, from the house of her benefactors, taken a Fifth avenue stage, and ridden the long way to Fulton ferry. A chill went over her when the stage rolled by the residence of the Doubledays—yet she felt that no hour of the day or night was so safe for her to be out as this early hour when the luxurious aristocrats of the vicinity were buried in slumber.

Crossing the ferry, she walked up a steep street to the Heights, turned into one of the cross-streets, and soon arrived at her mother's door. The city clock was chiming eight as she ascended the old-fashioned wooden steps and rung the bell.

"I want to see Mrs. Britton," she said to the slatternly housemaid who opened the door.

"What name?"—the girl was a new one who had taken service there since Bessie left the house.

"Never mind the name. Say to her that a young lady wishes to see her."

"Indade, an' she's jist set down to her breakfast, miss."

"I know my way to the dining-room," said Bessie, pushing by her and hastening on to the little room at the end of the hall.

Mrs. Britton was sitting alone at a small round table. The cup in her hand fell with a crash into its saucer as the slim, light figure stepped into the room; her face became pale as ashes and she rose to her feet, staring with wild wide eyes at the intruder.

"Yes, mother, it is Bessie," said the girl, quietly, removing her veil as she spoke.

Shriek after shriek rung through the house; the new servant rushed in expecting to find her mistress murdered, at the least.

"It is nothing," said the young lady to her. "Mother was not expecting to see me, and she is hysterical."

By that time Mrs. Britton had rushed up and seized her hand—

"Child, child, is it you? Is this my Bessie? Oh, God be thanked! I thought it was your ghost when you came in so calmly! Bessie, where have you been? Why have you allowed me to think you dead? Ah, I thought you were burned in that terrible fire."

"Mother, I am cold and hungry—or at least, faint. I will take a cup of that coffee, and afterward we will talk matters over."

The mother's hands shook as she prepared the coffee. Bessie laid aside her wraps and sat down at the table; there was something so cold, so composed, so strange and dignified about her, that her own parent watched her with a sort of awe—if this was the timid child she had been wont to bend to her will, she felt that she had lost her power over her.

Bessie drank her coffee and ate part of a roll.

"Are you glad to find me alive, mother?" she asked, at last.

"It lifts a stone from my breast, Bessie,"—and this was true, for a terrible remorse had haunted the selfish woman since that awful night when she gave her daughter up as lost. "Why have you left me in this sorrow so long?"

"Do you need to ask, mother? You literally forced me to marry a man I abhorred. When Fate opened a way of escape from him, be sure I took it. I could not conceal myself from *him* unless I kept the news of my safety from you, also. I am years older than I was two months ago, mother. I have thought things out for myself. Perhaps you thought you were doing your duty by me when you secured me a rich husband. I shall never live with that man. I am going away from this part of the world. But I thought I would come and see you once—let you know that I am living—and say good-by in peace. Indeed, mother, I want you to be happy—Oh, mother! mother! I want you to live a right life, so that I can honor and respect as much as I love you."

The girl was on her knees, now, at her mother's feet, looking up at her with lovely, tearful eyes.

"Oh! so you have come here to preach to me," said the other, flushing and frowning. "It is not like you to be impertinent, Bessie. What have I done that you should not respect me?"

"I hardly know, mother. I hope nothing which you cannot repent and win God's forgiveness for. I could not bear you should be mourning over me, mother; and so I have come to see you once more and say good-by. And I want you to promise me that you will give no hint of my existence to Mr. Doubleday. Let him continue to believe me dead. You will give me your sacred promise, mother?"

Mrs. Britton looked away from her child's sweet, pleading face.

"I have no right to promise you that, Bessie. You are his wife. It is wrong of you to be doing as you are doing. It is foolish to the last degree. There isn't a girl on Fifth avenue who would not jump at the chance of becoming his wife. Yet you, who are his wife, and might be holding up your head with the highest, living in luxury—an old man's darling—are behaving like a little fool. I shall let him know that you have been here just as soon as I can send a telegram. It is my duty."

"Then I am sorry I came to see you, mother, though I could not bear to have you in mourning for me; and I wanted to see you again. Good by. I shall not come again."

"I ought not to let you go; I ought to lock

you up and send for your husband. You do not seem to think how I am left. Mr. Doubleday would have given me a handsome allowance. He promised it. Now I am left penniless."

"Would you live on my unhappiness, mother?"

"Fie, Bessie! Your notions are too high-flown for me. Yes; it is my duty to hold you until I can send for your husband."

"You can not hold me, mother," said Bessie, quite calmly, and she arose and walked out into the street.

Mrs. Britton wrote a few words and dispatched them, by her servant, to the nearest telegraph office. Before noon, she and Doubleday, senior, were closeted together, talking over the wonderful revelation.

"I shall find her, easily enough, now that I know what I am about," declared the gentleman. "I shall employ a private detective. The sly little minx! to think she should have cheated us so completely. Stay, hold! I think of something!" but he did not explain to his companion the *idea* which had occurred to his mind.

A memory had rushed over him of his son's description of the beautiful girl who had repaired Viva's dress! Had he been duped there? At least, he would make a note of it. A detective could be set to watching that house—might hire a room in it, if necessary. That would be one step taken.

The old gentleman went home, that afternoon, in good spirits.

As for poor Bessie, her visit to her mother was likely to prove a fatal mistake. For the girl had resolved to return to Mrs. Harland's for a week or two, until she could make preparations for going to some western city, where she could support herself handsomely by her painting; either this, or doing the one other thing which she feared yet longed to do.

This other thing was a wonderful, daring deed, the possibility of which had been revealed to her that hour when she trembled behind the velvet curtain of Mr. Darrow's library, astonished, overpowered, by the revelation there made to her.

It was only three days after that unfortunate visit to Brooklyn, that Bessie, toward dark of the brief winter-day, coming out with Edith for a breath of air, and so veiled that she believed herself unrecognizable, was horrified to be tapped on the shoulder by a tall, stout man, who showed her a policeman's star hidden on the inside of his coat, and a written paper which she could not read:

"I have an order for your arrest, Mrs. Doubleday," said he, "so get into this carriage, without any fuss. A scene on the street will only make it unpleasant for you, madam."

A closed carriage stood by the curb-stone; another policeman was holding the door open for her to enter; but Bessie, in wild despair, refused to take a step, and when the first officer attempted to push her gently toward the vehicle, she set up a succession of screams that rung far and wide through the street.

A crowd quickly gathered; two or three more policemen came up; the girl appealed frantically to them—but, when they saw it was a case of

warranted arrest, they smiled and shook their heads.

CHAPTER X.

CONFOUND THE MINX.

As Bessie's shrieks rung out on the night air, a tall, athletic young man, who had been walking leisurely along in that direction, began to run, dashed into the crowd, shouldered people right and left, and with flashing eyes, made his way up to the policeman who was pushing this girl into the carriage.

"What does this mean? That young lady is a friend of mine—you touch her at the peril of your life."

"I'm only obeying orders, young man. Who are you, I'd like to know?"

"I am Le Roy Doubleday," was the haughty answer.

"Oh, the deuce you are! I suppose you know what you are about, then! Where do you want the lady taken to? Has the old gentleman changed his mind?"

This was gibberish to young Roy. "Has the old gentleman changed his mind?" Without the clew, how could he guess what old gentleman was referred to? Of course it must be that hideous old man who called himself Bessie's husband, but of whose name he was in complete ignorance.

"If they are deceived, let us humor them," he whispered in her ear. "At least, I shall be with you, to defend you. I will take you wherever you wish to go. Is there any place?"

"Oh, yes, take me back to Mr. and Miss Darrow! That is the only place on earth for me; I am sorry I left them. But, Roy, I am afraid to go in this carriage, with those men!"

"You will have to go with them, it seems. If you can deceive them, and get them to take you where you want to go, it will be the best thing for you. Get in, and I will go with you. To No. —, Fifth avenue," he cried, authoritatively, to the man on the box.

"Is that Doubleday's orders?" asked the detectives.

"Certainly. I tell you I am Doubleday."

"His son; I knew that; I've seen you before. It's all right, then?"

"All right," cried the young man, impatiently.

He had placed Bessie in the coach, and now got in himself, the detectives got up with the driver, the other policeman shut the door, and the carriage drove off, leaving poor Edith frightened and confounded, in the midst of the laughing, jeering mob which had collected about the scene.

"It's a runaway couple, after all," commented one of the crowd. "A mighty handsome pair, too! I thought, at first, it was an abduction, the lady made such a fuss."

"An' so it was, bedad," cried a burly Irishman. "Didn't I see how she didn't want to go a step?"—and Edith went home to her mother, herself bewildered and distressed, not able to decide if her friend had been carried off by emissaries of the man she feared, or had gone willingly with young Doubleday.

"My darling!" murmured Roy, passing his arm about her, as the carriage rolled along.

"How fortunate that I came up as I did! How you tremble! poor, frightened dove! Calm yourself, Bessie; you are in *my* hands, who will give my life rather than see you fall into the power of him you so dislike."

"Are we really on our way to Mr. Darrow's?"

"I shall see you safe inside his door, my sweet. So do not shiver and tremble so. Ah, Bessie, how terrible it is that you should be situated as you are! Is there no remedy?"

"Roy, I do not know. I have been afraid even to consult a lawyer. But now I shall tell Mr. Darrow everything. He will advise me for the best, I am sure. He is kind and honorable and— Oh, if I dared to tell you a wonderful thing which has lately become known to me! Perhaps, in a few days, I can. It is something you will be glad to hear. I would tell you now, only I am not yet quite *sure* of it."

It was a long drive, but it seemed short to them. They were together—that was enough! Not even the unhappy circumstances which had been the cause of their being here, as they were, had power to check that brief ecstasy of bliss.

Hand in hand they sat, now silent, now murmuring some lovers' folly, while the miles were left behind.

"Look, we are almost there!" cried Roy at last.

Again Bessie fell to trembling violently. She had escaped, by the merest accident, a frightful danger, but she knew not what welcome the Darrows would accord her, after her flight from their kind protection. She understood the mistake into which the detective had fallen when Roy mentioned the name of Doubleday; more than once, during that ride by his side, she had made an effort to confess the whole ghastly truth to her lover—that it was his own respected father to whom she was married—but her tongue seemed paralyzed when it tried to frame the words which would give him such a blow.

"Why, what under the moon and stars!" cried Roy, a moment later. "The fellow must have misunderstood me! He is stopping in front of our house, instead of Darrow's."

"Tell him to drive on. For mercy's sake, tell him to drive on!"

Bessie's whisper was sharp with terror; her little hand grasped his arm with sudden strength.

"Do not be alarmed, my darling. My friends are your friends. It seems my father is coming down the steps to speak to the man. We will go on in a moment."

"Your father?"

"Yes, Bessie, what in the world is the matter with you?"

The coach had come to a full stop by the curbstone. There was a street-lamp close by. It was entirely night by this time; but the lamp made the surroundings visible. She saw the elegant house, the wide flight of carved stone steps, the massive portico, the windows ablaze with light, and the gray-haired, agile gentleman of sixty coming down the steps bareheaded, and hastening to the carriage.

"What luck, Peterson?" he asked in low, dis-

ting tones, as he came up and laid his hand on the handle of the coach-door.

"Good luck, sir, this time. The lady is inside. I would have taken her to Brooklyn, according to orders, only your son came up at the time and altered the direction. I take it it's all right?"

"My son?" gasped the stately broker.

Roy, dumb with amazement, was trying to make out the meaning of this brief dialogue; he did not notice Bessie until he suddenly became aware that she had forced open the opposite door to that where his father stood, leaped down into the street, and was running like a deer in the direction of George Darrow's.

"After her, man!" shouted the senior broker, as if the flying girl were some hunted game and the officer a dog. "After her! Confound the minx, she shall not escape me longer!"

And then and there ensued the strangest scene that ever occurred in that aristocratic highway—that "street of palaces" where decorum reigns. Fortunately it was the hour at which our great people dine, and few besides those engaged in the action of the little drama were on the street.

Urged on by horror and despair, the young girl flew toward the only refuge she knew, followed by three men—the detective, Doubleday and his son. It was a race of a block and a half.

A rod or two in advance, Bessie sprung up the steps of the Darrow residence and pulled the bell. Then she stood breathless, quivering, gasping;—would that cruel door never open?

It seemed to her long minutes, and yet it was only ten seconds when the officer and Roy simultaneously set their feet on the first step, while the older man came panting along the pavement—and the door opened wide, letting out a flood of light on the strange group, and showing to Bessie John's kindly, familiar face.

With a bound she had entered and shrunk behind him.

"John, John," she panted, "do not let them in!"

The astonished servant made a movement to close the door, but the officer showed his badge and pushed his way in, followed by Roy, and a couple of minutes later by the respectable, portly, dignified figure of Mr. Doubleday, senior.

Hearing a tumult in the hall of his house, George Darrow, who had just finished dining, came out of the dining-room part way down the hall, where he paused confounded.

The next moment Miss Black stood by his side, her cold little hands clinging to his, her bonnet off, her face white as death, her golden hair streaming down her shoulders, her blue eyes darkening and widening with an expression of fear and anguish, as they roved from the two set faces of father and son.

"Father, what does this mean?"

"That is what I am curious to know. How came you here, Roy?"

"I was with this young lady, at her request, to protect her."

"Your attentions were superfluous. The young lady is my wife; and as such, I am amply able to protect her."

"YOUR wife, father?"

"She has been my wife for over two months. I dare say I should have told you and Viva of my marriage, but I dreaded your ridicule. However, now that you see the lady, you cannot but approve my choice. She would do honor to any house, would she not? A little willful and stubborn, perhaps, for she is very young, but lively as an Houri, and I dote upon her with all a young man's fondness. Come, Bessie, cease your childish conduct, and come home, where my affection and the position of wife awaits you. My children will congratulate me, and you will learn to be very happy."

Roy turned his miserable eyes upon the shrinking girl—

"Is this true Bessie? Are you *his* wife?"

She bowed her head and stood drooping.

"Why did you not tell me—at first? you might have saved me some shame and sorrow."

"I could not bring myself to tell you," she faltered.

"Nor can I bring myself to be a rival of my own father. I wish I had known this at the beginning."

He turned away, opened the outer door, and went forth without another word; a little moan broke from Bessie's lips as the door closed, and she leaned more heavily against Mr. Darrow.

Meantime, Mr. Doubleday sat down in a chair near at hand, as if he too, had received a blow which told on his strength.

The detective whistled softly to himself and studied the pattern of the carpet. A heavy cloud rested on the brow of George Darrow:

"This is a painful scene," he said, after a minute's silence. "I am sorry it has happened in my house. Bessie, what are you going to do? Do you think you can make up your mind to live contentedly with the gentleman who claims you as his wife? Why did you marry him, if you did not mean to live with him?"

"I was too much under my mother's influence. She made me feel that it was wicked for me to set up my will against her wish. I did think, for the time being, that perhaps I might become reconciled, but when we separated, during that awful scene in the theater, I felt that God had given me an opportunity to free myself from my false, unholy, wicked vows to be his wife. Oh, pity me, have mercy upon me," she cried, suddenly breaking from her friend, and throwing herself at her husband's feet. "I would far, far rather die than be your wife, Mr. Doubleday!"

CHAPTER XI.

"OH, I HOPE NEVER TO MEET HIM!"

"You are flattering!" said the broker, bitterly, looking down into the too-lovely, too-attractive face. "Had your mother honestly reported your sentiments to me, I certainly should not have carried my attentions to the point of persecution. She gave me to understand that your affections might be won when you were once my wife; in fact, that you had some admiration of my good qualities, as well as a great ambition to set off your beauty by the jewels and fine clothes I would give you. Your tears she set down to coyness—your cold-

ness to coquetry. In short, she played her part well, however foolish you and I may have been. I don't like to see you at my feet, Mrs. Doubleday; pray, rise," and most courteously he lifted her from her knees.

"But, what are you going to do with me?" she asked, standing before him, trembling and pale, like one about to receive a death-sentence.

He looked her over in grim silence.

Never had her marvelous loveliness seemed to him so bewitching. The very pallor lent a charm to the young face. What! resign this exquisite creature whom he had won, by the power of money for his own? What power was there to compel him to this generosity? None! She was his wife. He had the marriage certificate in his pocket, he had paid the heavy bills her mother had run up for jewels and bridal finery. He felt angry and insulted that she should regard him as so utterly unlovable.

"You are my wife," he answered. "I have a right to your obedience."

Yet he was thinking of his son's face as he confronted him a little time ago—of his boy's proud, reproachful, despairing face; and his own heart felt restless and sore. He had been a good father to his children, and they had loved and honored him.

Would the presence of this young bride in his house repay him for the loss of his son's regard? Would home be home to Roy with that beautiful girl in it, whom he had learned to love, not knowing that she was his father's wife?

One moment he was troubled by these reflections; the next his arrogant nature asserted itself:

"I picked out a suitable bride for Roy, and asked him to woo her. Why does he not fancy Paula Verplanck? There's a girl for him!—lovely, accomplished, stylish, with no end of money. It's pure obstinacy his not taking to her! And she is dead in love with him, too! For *her* sake I ought to maintain my rights. He will outlive this fancy for Bessie in a little while—I see no reason why I need sacrifice my own wishes.

"Get your hat, Bessie, and come home. It is time this folly were ended. Mr. Darrow, you certainly will advise this obstinate girl what is for her own good? I shall make her a kind, indulgent husband; she will be the head of a splendid establishment; the rest is all romance and folly."

George Darrow looked into the pitiful face of the girl for whom he had conceived so warm a liking; he knew not what to say; was love, after all, only the idle dream of poets and fools, and a good settlement to be preferred to mere sentiment? His own experience had been so sad—his hopes so blighted—had he not sworn never to believe in woman's truth or love's reality?

What should he say? He went up to Bessie and took her hand in his own; he desired to act wisely and yet her suffering wrung his heart; at last he stammered out:

"Let us not be hasty, Mr. Doubleday. The child is frightened and distressed. I propose that you give her a few days in which to come to a final decision. She will be safe here, under my aunt's protection; and I give you my word

of honor that she will be here, when you come for your answer."

"Very well; how much time do you want, Mrs. Doubleday?"

"Give her one week," pleaded Darrow, earnestly.

"A week then, Bessie. And you must promise me that you will have no meetings with Roy during that time."

"With Roy? Oh, I hope never, *never* to meet him again!" cried the girl, quivering and hiding her eyes with her hand.

"Good-night, then, both of you; and now, Peterson, if the carriage is waiting you may take me home, as I believe I came off without my hat. And, Peterson," as the two went down the steps, "not a word of this to the public! If any scandal leaks out, your reward will dwindle proportionately. I shall get my pretty young wife, some day; and I don't care to be made a laughing-stock."

"Of course not, sir," says Peterson, gravely, anxious about the five hundred dollars, he has been promised. "Mrs. Doubleday is quite the handsomest young lady I ever saw; she will make a great sensation, sir, in the upper circles; and I hope you and she may yet be as 'appy as birds together."

When Doubleday reached home he found his elegant dinner quite spoiled, the butler anxious, his daughter full of wonder and Miss Paula, who had been asked to dine informally with her, half-famished and in low spirits.

"Where is Roy?" asked the broker, uneasily.

"He came in, went up to his room a few moments, and went out again. I thought he was certain to dine at home, this evening, or I would not have asked Paula; it will be so dull for her."

"Not at all," says Paula, with a charming smile at the father, and an attempt to appear very gay. "I hope I do not come here, Viva, to visit your brother? Don't accuse me of it!"

"Of course not, my pet; only it is always nicer to have Roy about. I am only his sister, yet I am very fond of him. Well, if he doesn't return, papa shall take us to Wallack's."

Roy did not return. Nor had he, when they came back from the theater; neither was he at breakfast; but when the broker looked over an evening paper, on his way home from Wall street, that afternoon, he saw his son's name among the list of passengers who had sailed for Havre at noon.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

WHILE Roy was on his out-bound voyage, one moment bemoaning the fate that ever brought Bessie in his way, and in the next raving at that which had thrown his own father across his path, then scorning the woman who could have given herself for gold, strange things were coming to light in two of Fifth avenue's stately residences. Viva, too, had seen her brother's name on the steamer list, but on questioning her father was answered so sharply that she despaired of finding out anything from that quarter; and certain she was that something was very wrong with her father. After a fit of blues, and a crying spell, she sent for Paula to

confide to her her surprise at Roy's sudden departure and her father's strange conduct.

"There is something wrong, or Roy would never have left me without a word; and papa is a perfect bear. He won't let me mention Roy's name."

"It is only a little tiff—money or business, or something of the kind, and your father will get over it and send for Roy soon."

"They never had any trouble before, and papa always says that Roy manages the business splendidly, so it can't be that," tearfully. "You stay here with me a few days, anyway, I am so lonesome. How I wish I had a sister or a mother! I wish you were my sister, Paula," throwing an arm around her.

Paula wished so, too, but caressed Viva silently, and the two girls sat before the grate fire, lost in those dreams so dear to girlhood. Viva would have been slightly startled could she have read the thoughts running through the mind of her companion.

"I am sure there is a woman at the bottom of this," thought Paula. "Roy Doubleday has got himself into a scrape and run away to get out of it, while his father is righteously indignant. I never cared particularly for Roy, but he is the only son, and will come in for a good, liberal fortune, which, taken in consideration with a handsome face and figure, would have made him a by no means unsuitable husband for a Verplanck. But I can do better yet, and have my revenge on him for the way in which he has treated me. I will set my cap for the old gentleman himself. He won't live forever, then I shall be rich beyond wish, and Roy Doubleday won't find his slice of the property quite as large as it might have been. Yes, I'll do it. I'll make the old man marry me."

"Viva, dear, if I am going to stay with you, I must run over home and have my maid put me up some dresses, and get myself ready for dinner. Put on a cheerful face, and make yourself pretty for your father; he will soon forget his troubles in your smiles—and in mine," she added, mentally.

When Mr. Doubleday came home to dinner, he was met by two bright young beauties, who entertained him so royally that for a time he forgot his vexation, and was quite youthful.

"She can't have cared much for Roy," he thought, when the young people had left him to his wine. "I thought she was quite in love with him. How bright she is! I wish I had some one to be with me so all the time. What a fool I have been! But I will see my young wife presiding over this table yet, and have my house gay and bright as it is to-night."

He little thought that he was further than ever from his wishes; that in a certain house in the next block scenes had that day been enacted which not only widened the distance between them, but gave Bessie a protector she never yet had had.

Bessie was in perfect despair after Mr. Doubleday had left her. Mr. Darrow had offered his protection for a time, "but I cannot keep you from your husband," said he. "You are legally his, and no one can come between you. Oh, Bessie, how could you get yourself into such trouble?"

"Thee must not worry the child any more to-night," broke in Aunt Dorothy, "to-morrow will be time enough. Then we will see what can be done," and with great tenderness she put her young friend to bed and soothed her into quiet before she left her.

But to-morrow found Bessie unable to leave her bed. Feverish and worn, she tossed around until, fearful of a fit of sickness, Aunt Dorothy sent for a physician, who pooh-poohed her fears, gave Bessie a soothing draught, and left sleep to do the rest, which it did. She awakened refreshed the next morning, though weak, and kind Miss Darrow insisted on her taking breakfast in bed, after which Bessie again told her all her story, this time, of course, including names.

"Oh that I had had a mother like other girls," she cried, "that I had had some one to befriend me when so hard-pressed that I had no choice but to marry a man I hated!"

"Poor child! I scarcely know what to advise. I fear thee must make the best of it and go to him."

"Oh, I cannot! I cannot!"

"Well, wait until thee is a little stronger—then we will see. Now rest until luncheon, and then thee can see George."

But Bessie arose and dressed herself as soon as alone, and, though quite weak, descended to the library, opened the side door, lifted the heavy velvet curtain behind which she had been concealed the evening she had learned Mr. Darrow's sad story, and entered the room before she discovered he was not alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

FATHER AND CHILD.

THE second morning after the strange episode enacted in his own hall, George Darrow sat lost in thought. More strongly than ever he felt drawn toward Bessie, and heartily wished he could rescue her from the hands of the elder Doubleday. "Of course a separation could be had," thought he, "seeing she was forced into the marriage by her mother, her legal guardian, but only with the consent of both, and he won't give his, that's very certain."

Just then the door opened, and glancing up he was confronted by the same handsome woman who a few nights before, had so disturbed him.

"You here again! How dare you intrude, after what I told you? Do you wish me to call the police?"

"If you think it would be policy on your part, why, do so," with a sneer, "but do it, and you will repent it in dust and ashes."

"You dare to threaten me?"

"You would not use that word 'dare' quite so much with me if you knew of the information I could give you."

"Again you come here to extort money! What is it that you have to say? Out with it, and let me know what is expected of me."

"That would be business-like, to tell you what I know, and then have you snap your fingers at me."

"I can have no business with you, nor you with me. Let that settle it."

"But supposing I ask for money, not for myself, but for your child?"

"One who has been dead for years, needs no

money. If you use the name of my dead child for such a purpose, by George, I'll turn you over to the police, and your name will be dragged lower than ever yet," cried George Darrow, but she could see that her words left their impression, and a look of triumph crept over her cruel face.

"I told you the other day that I lied when I wrote our child was dead."

"I'm not surprised to hear it; you were never remarkable for truthfulness. However, that has nothing to do with the present."

"Don't be so sure of that. If she did not die then, it is just possible she has not since."

Mr. Darrow could not repress a start as the thought again came over him, "Supposing this woman were in earnest, supposing his child really were alive." But he controlled himself at once.

"Were she still alive, - doubt I should care to see one who had grown up under your care and influence, a second edition of yourself, probably," he said, with a sneer.

"Supposing she had grown up entirely different, more like her father and her father's family?"

"Then God help her with such a mother!" and his thoughts drifted to the poor girl lying up-stairs, thinking that just such a mother must hers have been. He sat in silence so long that the woman began to grow impatient. At last she said:

"Have you nothing further to ask about your own flesh and blood?"

"No; nothing from you."

"Well, I may as well go then; but rest assured you will learn nothing from any one else. And," with her hand on the door, "I suppose it won't do any harm to tell you that our child is alive. I wish you good-day."

George Darrow sprung from his chair like a madman, and rushed for the woman, now almost out of his reach. Seizing her by the arm, he dragged her back into the room, locked the door, pocketed the key, and thrust her into a chair.

"Woman, what do you mean? Is this some infernal lie of yours to get money, or is it the truth? Speak!"

"You are most gentlemanly: really, your language is most choice."

"It will be choicer still if you do not speak out instantly."

"Oh! You are coming to your senses at last, and would really like valuable information. Come, now, how much will you give me?"

"Did I not tell you that not one cent would I give, under such conditions?"

"Then my mouth is sealed, and when the truth is known, you will repent you bitterly, for the daughter you have rejected; for the child that might have been the comfort of your remaining days."

"Torturer! Fiend among women! You were the curse of my youth, and now my gray hairs cannot be left in peace, but you must come again into my life!"

"Complimentary!"

"How am I to know that what you say is true? How can I buy something that does not exist?" he went on, walking the floor like a

caged panther. "What will you tell me, if I come to your terms? What knowledge am I to buy? Let me know more definitely what I am to have for my money. Money! money!" he muttered, "are you to bring me but a curse, after all?"

A malicious, mocking smile crept over the dark face of the woman, in a vain attempt to hide the triumph that would shine from her eyes. Here at last was within her grasp the longed-for gold, comparative ease, and luxury for the rest of her days; for it was no mean sum she intended to wring from this man. She knew him of old; knew his kind heart and generous ways; knew the bitterness his enforced loneliness must bring with it; knew she had struck the only key that would ever open his coffers to *her*, the woman who had ruined his name, his home, his honor, his whole life. And she meant to make good use of this knowledge. She had drudged for years, now she would have wealth. To be sure, she did not know where the child, now a young lady, was; she had done her duty by her in marrying her to a rich old widower; the girl had run away from him, and no one knew where she was; but she, herself, would get the money, and George Darrow might find his child. She must use extreme caution, or her plans might yet fall through, for he had such a head for business that he would catch her in some trap, if he possibly could. She remained silent, waiting for him to speak again.

He paused in his walk and stood before her, looking so sternly in her face that her bold eyes dropped before his honest ones.

"Ay, you can not look me in the eye," he said, "I believe yet that you have lied. What are you going to tell me, and what am I to pay for it? Come to business at once. I will have no more fooling."

"I have told you already that the child, now a woman, is alive; what else would you know?"

"Some positive knowledge that will convince me that it is worth my while to bargain with you. Is she like yourself?"

"Not much! She is a Darrow, through and through, sweet, gentle, lovable, everything that you could wish. Like me! Humph, I should not have been here to-day, had she been; she is too unlike me for us to get on together. But I am going too fast. I will not tell another word until you come to terms, and I can promise you, you will never ascertain her whereabouts, except through me; neither can you appeal to the law, for the law gave her to me."

"Then state your price."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Great heavens! Are you mad?"

"I never was saner in my life."

"Don't you know that I could place this matter in the hands of a detective, find my child, and offer her a home, without a word from you, and without giving you a cent? that it is only to keep the affair quiet that I have for one moment thought of bargaining with you?"

"Yes, I know it; and I also know that you will give anything rather than have your name again dragged before the public."

George groaned. She was right. Anything

to purchase peace for the remainder of his days! But such a sum! It was preposterous, he would not submit to such extortion. Yet how he longed for the sweet face of his child.

"I will give you five thousand, and not a cent more."

"Five thousand! A mere song. No! I am not to be bought quite as cheaply as that. I have set my price and mean to abide by it."

"Then I have no more to say to you. I could pay your price, and double, if I liked, and scarcely feel it, but I will not. You are, as you always have been, an unprincipled woman, and no such sum of money shall pass from my hand into yours. You may go." He put the key in the door, and was about to open it, but she, seeing by the quiet determination in his face that he meant what he said, staid him.

"You surely will not give up what you so much prize, for the difference of a few thousand dollars? Make it twenty thousand and I shall be satisfied."

"I named my price, and will not alter it."

"Call it fifteen thousand."

"Five thousand, I said."

"You are mean," she cried, growing angry as her prospects faded. "Your wealth has spoiled you. That you would ever have become so stingy as to let a few paltry dollars stand between you and your daughter, I should not have believed. But know, Robert Britton, that through me, and me alone, will you ever see your child."

"Don't be so sure of that," said a sweet, clear voice behind them. With a scream Mrs. Britton turned.

"Bessie Britton, you here?"

"Yes, mother; here."

"Mother? Bessie, is this so?" exclaimed Mr. Darrow. "What does this mean?"

"Only that—" began Mrs. Britton.

"Silence!" thundered George. "Bessie, my child, speak."

"Yes, your child, indeed, father," going up to him. "You know my sad story; there is nothing to tell, excepting that there stands the woman who forced me into my mad marriage."

"A pretty way to speak of your own mother, and after all I've done for you! It's just like you, Bessie Britton, after I've slaved for years to bring you up decently, and made a splendid match for you, to forsake me for a stranger you have not known a month. You are a Britton, through and through."

"Then you acknowledge this to be my child, Harriet Britton?"

"I acknowledge nothing. You may believe her so, if you like. For all you know, she may be any one else's child. I may have adopted her for purposes of my own. I sha'n't tell you anything."

"How dare you deny your own child? Heartless, worthless woman! Go!" pointing to the door.

"Yes, I'll go. But take my advice and enjoy your daughter while you can, for, mark my words, Robert Britton, I'll be even with you yet." And with a more evil look on her face than he had ever yet seen there, she went.

Weak as Bessie was, her father was far more unnerved. He sunk on the sofa and covered his

face with his hands. She knelt beside him, put her arms around him, and tenderly drew his head to her shoulder, whispering—"Father, dear!"

"Bessie," he exclaimed, looking up, "no wonder I felt so strongly drawn toward you. Oh, my child, my child!"

"Yours, yet not yours. Father, can't you save me from that man? Oh, father, save me!"

"Bessie, I cannot. The law gives you to him, and I am powerless to interfere. I must lose you just as I have found you. Oh, if there is retribution in this world, or the next, may it fall with its full weight on that woman!"

"How dreadfully she looked as she closed the door. Father, can she harm me further? What did she mean by what she said?"

"Nothing but her wild talk. We are out of her power now entirely. Don't disturb yourself with any fancies. Come, I will take you to Aunt Dorothy, who will be more tender of you now than ever."

As they left the room, a pair of wicked, dark eyes gleamed out from behind the velvet curtain.

"You are out of my power, are you? We shall see, we shall see! You will live, both of you, to repent this day."

CHAPTER XIV.

GONE!

MR. DOUBLEDAY had intended calling upon his wife that evening, but had found the home society so attractive that the evening had slipped away, and he had not gone. "To-morrow morning will do," he thought. But to-morrow came, and the girls teased him to drive with them. They carried him off to the Park; to Delmonico's for lunch; then to see some pictures on exhibition, and home to dinner again. Never had Paula Verplanck appeared to better advantage, never had she been more brilliant. "That is the kind of a girl I should have married," he thought, as her bright face was raised to his in gay conversation. "What a 'muff' Bessie will be if she mopes, as I expect she will. I half wish I were out of this scrape. No, I don't, either. She shall come here and behave herself. I won't be over-ridden by a chit of seventeen, I—a Doubleday! Who is *she* that she should set herself up against me? But, oh! she is lovely, lovely."

"Really, Mr. Doubleday, where are your thoughts?" said Paula, pouting. "I've been talking to you for the last three minutes, and you have not heard a word I've been saying."

"Beg pardon, my dear. Business will intrude itself, even in the most charming society."

Just then the bell rung a sharp peal through the house.

"A gentleman to see you, sah," announced Sambo; "most immejetly, he said."

"Well, girls, I suppose I must go. Finish your dessert, and I will join you in the drawing-room, when I have done with this gentleman, whoever he may be."

He reached the library, to be confronted by George Darrow, pale and agitated. "Is Mrs. Doubleday here?" he asked, hurriedly.

"Most certainly not. Did I not give you my word that she should remain with you a week?"

"Great Heaven! She's gone, then!"

"Gone! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say; she has disappeared. There has been foul play somewhere; she never would have gone of her own accord."

"I left her in your keeping, Mr. Darrow, and you are responsible for her. If she has gone, you have aided and abetted her. She could not have left your house unknown to you. Now you come here with your story, and expect me to believe it."

"Then she really is not here?"

"Do you doubt my word?"

"No; but I tell you there has been foul play, and I must have your aid."

"If she has really gone, you'll have to pay for it, my man! I'll sue you for abduction, I'll—"

"Hold there, Mr. Doubleday. Be careful what you say. I will find her, but the world shall know of your conduct; the name of Doubleday will figure in the Divorce Courts. You never shall have her, never, as long as you live. You have made *her* suffer; *you* shall suffer now; your pride shall have a fall." He turned to go.

"Stay, Mr. Darrow. I really didn't mean what I said, but the idea of her having escaped me again took my senses away for a minute. Why *you* should be so annoyed at her escape, I cannot see. I should think *I* was the one to rave about it. She got away from me once before. If she has done so again, I will have her, dead or alive. I will not be played with fast and loose, in this style, by a mere girl."

"Are you going to help find her? That is the most important question just now," impatiently.

"Why, yes, as well as I can. I can't do much, or my name may get mixed up with it."

"Your name! Always your name! If you are ashamed of this marriage, why did you not quietly put an end to it, when she asked you to release her? Let me tell you that a Britton is a match for a Doubleday twice over, and *she* is as much too good for you as Beauty for a Beast—"

"How dare you address me so! What do you know about the Brittons? Who are *you*, I'd like to know?"

"I am Robert Britton, father to Bessie, living under my mother's name, through no fault of my own," replied George Darrow, keeping his temper admirably. "The woman who deceived me years ago and ruined my life, deceived you with regard to Bessie, and it is she, I feel sure, who has brought this fresh trouble on us."

"The dickens!"

"Now, as her father, I demand to know what you are going to do? I am losing valuable time. I shall place this matter in the detectives' hands, and it will be impossible to keep her marriage secret. Her mother is probably trying to get money from one or both of us, and my advice to you is not to offer one cent in such a way it will reach her. Not one cent shall she ever have from me."

"Nor from me. Go ahead in your own way, Darrow. You seem to know best. Let us go together, and you can tell me how she disappeared on our way.—Better get on the right side of this man," he thought. They left the

house and returned to Darrow's to see if any news had been obtained; but nothing had been heard.

"I shall go straight to the Detective Office," said Mr. Darrow, as they went down the steps together. Neither saw the man who was lurking in the shadow of the next doorway.

"So that's your game, is it?" he muttered. "I thought as much, and worked accordin'. The detectives are cute, but they'd have to be cuter still to find me out. I've dodged 'em more than once."

"Bessie went to her room to dress for dinner, since when she has not been seen. That she would not have left me willingly, I feel sure. That Harriet Britton has a hand in this, I feel equally sure, but have no proofs," continued Mr. Darrow. "Who was that fellow you had the other night?"

"Peterson. He is an excellent man for his work, and being already interested in the case, will be the one to take it in hand now."

"I wish to tell you, Mr. Doubleday, before we go further in this matter, that when I find my daughter, I shall do all in my power to have her marriage set aside. If the law can do it, it shall be done."

"It will be war to the knife then, for I shall never give her up. But until we find her, I think we might better run up a flag of truce."

"Agreed," said Darrow, who had no wish to quarrel with his neighbor. "Here we are."

Peterson was in, and after listening to the facts, promised to report as soon as he learned anything. He advised them to be quiet in the mean time, and not to advertise; if that had to be done, he would do it. There being nothing further to be done, that night, the gentlemen returned to their homes. Mr. Doubleday found the young ladies awaiting him.

"Oh, papa! Where have you been all this long evening?" exclaimed Viva.

"Has it been long, dear? I had to go on business with a friend; but I am glad to know that you missed me."

"We did indeed, and you know I promised to sing you my new song," Paula said, with a most enchanting smile.

"It is not too late for that, yet, is it?" he replied, leading her to the piano; but his thoughts were elsewhere, and she could see it.

Sleep did not visit George Darrow that night. He walked the floor hour after hour, thinking of his life, and how hardly fate had treated him. Why had he ever returned to this country? Yet he would never otherwise have known his sweet daughter. After daylight, he threw himself on the bed and fell into a heavy slumber which lasted until ten o'clock. Aunt Dorothy would not let him be disturbed; she had heard him walking his floor, and knew that every moment slept away now, would make the time shorter until they could hear from Peterson. At noon, a boy came with a note, which Mr. Darrow hastily tore open.

"Have been to B. and ascertained that Mrs. B. is at home, alone as usual, and that she has not left the house since yesterday noon, when she returned from her visit to you. Nor has any one been seen to visit her. We are foiled in that direction. You must be mistaken in your suspicions; but we will keep a watch on the house. PETERSON."

That was all. When would they know more? Oh where was his darling? In whose hands? He could stand it no longer. He rushed from the house, down to the detective's office, only to find Peterson out. So he returned as he came. Could Bessie have gone of her own accord?" he asked himself. Surely she was safer under his protection, than in trying to hide herself. She was too young and beautiful not to be found out, as she well knew. No, she had been taken by force; but how? She had not left the house. Could any of the servants have been bribed? They had all seemed fond of Bessie when she was in the house as companion to Miss Darrow. Thomas had come with him from Europe, had been with him for several years, and was above suspicion. A happy thought! He would take Thomas into his confidence, and set him to watching the house and other servants. He called him, and the two were closeted for an hour. When Thomas left the room, although Mr. Darrow had learned nothing, he felt he had gained a valuable assistant.

Evening brought Mr. Doubleday, and, shortly afterward, Peterson.

"As I writ you, Mr. Darrow, or rather 'ad writ to you this morning, all is quiet in Brooklyn. Mrs. Britton's h'actions h'are above suspicioning. I've been to h'all the steamer docks, h'all the depots in New York and Jersey City, and no such person h'ain't left by steamer nor express. She may have taken some accommodation train. Them 'ere carry so many people, there's no tellin'. But it's *my* h'opinion that she's h'in this city yet. There's not the slightest clew, and all we can do is to wait."

And this was all. Placing fifty dollars in Peterson's hand for any expense he might incur, and telling him not to advertise until every other means had failed, they dismissed him.

"Well, I can't see what more there is to be done," said Mr. Doubleday, rising, "unless we advertise, and I don't want to do that."

"No. Our better way is to keep quiet at present. Good-night."

They waited one week, two, three, but no news of Bessie ever came.

CHAPTER XV.

A FASHIONABLE ENGAGEMENT.

It is the hight of the season at Newport. The sun is scorching the few who have ventured out, his heat reflected from every sparkling wave that lazily, yet ceaselessly laps the rocks and beach. A few invalids are enjoying their daily sun-bath on the hot sands, but the beauties, who, a few hours later, will appear as fresh and cool as though the sun had never shone, are invisible, at least to the outer world.

In the Verplanck mansion ("villa," they are pleased to call it,) Paula, in cool white *negligee*, fresh as a June rose, is half-reclining on a bamboo sofa whose trimmings and pillow of pale blue satin form a dainty contrast against her white draperies. And Paula knows it. There is a half-suppressed gleam of triumph in her eyes, but her fringed lids hide that from her companion who sits on a footstool beside her. She has gained at last the prize for which she has so long been striving. Mr. Doubleday, senior, has just asked her to be his wife.

"I know I am old enough to be your father, dear, but I am younger than many a man of fifty. Do not be hasty, I will wait for your answer."

"There is no need to wait, Mr. Doubleday. I will be your wife. Do you think I would have encouraged your attentions, had I been unwilling to answer you thus? Surely no woman could help knowing what your intentions were, and a true woman would not have allowed them had she not entertained a reciprocal feeling." There is no look of deceit in her large eyes as she finishes; truly it would have taken second-sight to have read the real state of her feelings.

"My darling! I am so glad to hear you say so. I had scarcely hoped for so favorable an answer. You are mine now," saying which he leaned forward and kissed her right on her rosy lips, blind in his infatuation to the expression of repugnance that crept over the lovely face, as she felt his lips on hers.

"I have sold myself dearly," she is thinking, "but revenge is sweet. Roy Doubleday will return to find he cannot have me when he will."

Blind girl! Your revenge is no revenge, and your own life the only one made miserable by this foolish step.

"Paula, will you not call me Roy? Mr. Doubleday sounds rather stiff, doesn't it? Why, how pale you are! What's the matter, child?"

"Nothing," said Paula, recovering herself, "nothing but the heat. Will you give me a glass of water from the stand?" pointing to a small table containing a silver pitcher and goblets. When he brings her the water she is quite herself again.

"I think I might better call you Anson, for when your son returns, it might be awkward having two Roys in one house."

"That is true. Well, Anson, if you like. By the way, speaking of Roy, I heard from him last night, and he says he does not expect to return this fall. He thinks of spending the winter with some artist friends in Paris, and they will probably go to Egypt for a couple of months, so he won't be home for the wedding."

"What wedding?"

"Why ours, of course."

"Oh! I had not thought that far yet. But that won't be very soon."

"Some time this winter, I hope."

"Oh, no! Let us wait a year."

"A year! At my time of life a man can't afford to wait a year. No, Paula, let it be this winter, and then we can go to Florida or some pleasanter climate. Let it be before the holidays."

"Not until after New Year's; no, not a day before. Why, do you want to marry me before I have had time for a single purchase? It will take me from the time of my return until the middle of January, hard work, to get ready."

"Bother the trousseau! But I suppose I must submit. Ah, here comes Viva; shall we tell her?"

"No, let me do that alone."

"Then I will go," rising as Viva came in.

"Why, papa, you here! I fancied you asleep in your hammock, and ran over to stir up Paula, she is such a lazy girl. Are you going, papa? Well, you can take care of yourself at

lunch-time, for I am going to stay here the rest of the day. You can come and drive with us this afternoon. Good-by."

Viva is lovely to-day; her walk from house to house has given her just enough color to heighten her beauty, without flushing her uncomfortably. Take them together, and Newport can not boast a handsomer pair. They are the belles of the place this season, among the old aristocratic families who make their summer home in the old town.

"I see mischief in your eye, Viva. What is it?"

A merry peal of laughter is her only answer at first; as soon as Viva could speak, she asked: "Who do you think proposed to me last night?"

"Bobby Snipperton?"

"Oh no! Worse, a thousand times worse. *Old Newcomb!*"

"Old Newcomb?"

"Yes. Toothless (excepting for false teeth), bald (excepting for a wig), laced, paddled, painted, mummified old Newcomb?" At this, the two burst into a peal of laughter that might have done credit to a couple of school-girls.

"Fancy me the old man's darling," gasped Viva. At this Paula starts, then suddenly grows quiet.

"What is it, dear?" questions Viva.

"I, too, have had a proposal."

"Another! What a girl!"

"But this time it is serious."

"Really? Well, I am glad if you are, but I can't imagine who it can be."

"It is an old gentleman—"

"Oh, Paula! You wouldn't marry an old man."

"But he is an unusually fine one, and I do hope you will like it dear. I don't know what I shall do if you disapprove."

"I am afraid I cannot interfere in such a matter, even with you, so my disapproval won't count for much. Who is it, Paula? I'm dying to know."

"Viva, do you think I would make a good step-mother?"

"Oh, horrors! Has he got children? I am more 'at sea' than ever. Certainly, I think you would make a very nice step-mother."

"Would you like me for a step-mother?"

"I! What do you mean?"

"Oh, Viva! Can't you see it is your father I am going to marry?"

"My father! Paula Verplanck, what are you saying? My father marry again? I can't believe it!"

"That is complimentary to me."

"Forgive me, Paula. I did not mean to doubt your word, but this has come upon me so suddenly. I certainly never thought of such a thing as my father's marrying again. I have always been everything to him, why should I not be still?" beginning to cry.

Paula had expected a scene, and was prepared to keep her temper.

"Then am I so very objectionable? You never seemed to have thought so before."

"No, dear Paula. If papa must marry again, I should rather it were you than any one else, but the idea is so new to me. I thought we were to have been sisters." Her tears blind her

to the fact that Paula's face darkens at this mention of Roy.

While the girls were coming to an understanding, Mr. Doubleday sat in his library thinking: "Have I been foolish? Bessie is dead, I feel sure of that, or I certainly should have obtained some clew to her within the six months since she disappeared. Darrow said he had given up all hope before we left the city. He'll make a fuss about this, I'm afraid. Perhaps I'd better get a divorce before I marry Paula, but it might leak out, and that would spoil everything. I'll wait a couple of months longer, and if I hear nothing from Bessie before the holidays, I'll get a divorce on the ground of desertion. I will have time enough, if we are not married till the first of February, and Paula doesn't seem to be in any hurry. She seemed a little shy this morning, but I suppose that will soon wear off. I wonder how Viva will take it. If she makes as much of a fuss as Roy did about the other one, I shall have a nice time of it."

But Viva had had time to think well about it before she met her father in the afternoon, and had resolved to make the best of it. If she must share his affections with any one, 'twere better with Paula; so she met him smilingly, gave him a hug and a kiss, and told him he was an old dear to have made such a choice.

"I don't expect to have you with me forever, so you see I am prepared with a substitute."

"And a very sweet one, too," replied Viva. "Are you ready to drive with us? It is time."

They set out, a merry party, in their open barouche. Many eyes rested almost enviously on them.

"They do say as how the old gentleman is going to marry Miss Verplanck," said one bystander to another.

"Do tell! Well, he's an uncommon fine lookin' gent, if he is a leetle old fur her."

"So that's his game, is it?" muttered an evil-looking man standing near. "You've tried it once before, try it again, and you'll try it once too often. I owe you a long score, Roy Doubleday, and I mean to pay it off. The devil! What do you mean?" to a good-looking darky who had just run against him. "It's you, is it? What in the dickens brings you here?"

"De same what brings you here, I s'pose; business."

"None of your impudence to me, blackie. I owe you one now; don't make it two."

"You don't owe me nothing, as I knows on. If you do, why den, pay up like a man."

"I'll pay with interes', if you wait long enough."

"You may wait too long."

"What do you mean?"

"See here, John Green, (or whateber your name is, I don't believe it's dat), you don't want to ax me too many questions," saying which Thomas, for it was he, turned and walked off.

"D— the darky," muttered the man, "he either suspects me, or else he knows more than is safe for me. What's he doing down here just now? Darrow isn't here. I left Darrow's employ because I began to be afraid of that nigger."

Anyway, it was time I stopped playing the servant. I fancy I played it well, though."

Just then the Doubleday carriage returned.

"What an evil face," remarked Miss Verplanck, indicating the man with a slight gesture.

"It seems as though I had seen him before," replied Viva.

"Why, that is Darrow's coachman, only he is dressed up," said Mr. Doubleday. "There is his man Thomas, too. I wonder if he has brought his whole establishment down here. I thought he had gone to Colorado." Then to himself:—"This is a pretty go, if Darrow is here, and hears of my engagement to Paula before I have time to consider what steps I shall take, he may make trouble for me; while if I have time, I can make matters straight."

"So he's gone and engaged himself to Miss Verplanck, has he? You've done got you'self in a mess, shuah enuff, dis time, Mars' Doubleday. I wouldn't like to stan' in yer shoes. Jest wait until I ha... my plans perfecked."

"I'll make a round sum out of you yet, Roy Doubleday," muttered the man who had been talking with Thomas; "and what's more, I'll bring disgrace on you and Darrow, too."

CHAPTER XVI.

FREE, YET NOT FREE.

It was undoubtedly hot, more than hot, at Newport, even though the sea-breeze did its best to alleviate the sufferings of humanity, and at night succeeded. In the great city, no such relief came. Scorching, sweltering, baking between brick walls that never cooled, gasping for the air that was not, thousands of human beings struggled for existence. A few of the many succumbed, but the masses lived. Far better for some had they been dead. At least, so thought one. In a third-rate boarding-house, the second story back was more decently furnished than the rest of the house. Why it was so, or why the occupant never left the room, the mistress does not trouble herself to ask, nor why the room was always locked and the key carried by the occupant of the front room. She was well paid for her rooms, and for silence. Money was her idol; how she got it she cared not; whether it were blood money, or whether she swore her soul away for it, made no difference, much less did the entreaties of the lovely child-woman imprisoned there. Had she money to pay for her release, the woman would have let her go quickly enough.

It was nothing to her that she had given her word otherwise; but the girl was penniless, and as long as the woman could make money by keeping her, she would do so. If the time ever came when she should be given a good round sum for the girl, she would let her go.

But for the girl. Was this thin, white shadow, this hopeless creature, the once lovely bride of Roy Doubleday? It could not be. Yet stay—those are surely Bessie's eyes, though so woe-begone, and there is no mistaking that golden hair. Yes, it was Bessie, but oh! how changed!

"They would not know me now, were I to go to them," she tells herself every day. And it is nearly so; even those that loved her would look more than once before they could persuade themselves that this really was Bessie.

She has long since given up all hope of ever being found. Penned in that little room, the door securely locked, the windows carefully guarded by heavy wire nets that nothing less than a file could break, how could she ever, ever get away, and how could they ever find her in that low part of the city? The houses whose back rooms looked into hers were even worse. It was useless to hope for a friendly

face from any of their windows. She had given up that idea months ago. So, on that hot day she sits listlessly with her hands in her lap; it was too warm even to read. She was not *uncomfortably* situated, excepting with regard to room. She had plenty to read, embroidery to do, and, best of all, her painting. Her jailer had provided her well. She had good food, ice, and many little luxuries; at whose instigation this was so, she little guessed. She had wondered often that painting material should have been furnished her, and spent many hours in that delightful occupation. Whoever reaped the benefit of her productions must be making money; for certainly she earned far more than it cost to keep her, but not one cent did she ever have.

"How insufferably hot it is," she exclaimed, rising and going to the window in hopes of getting a breath of air. This cannot last much longer, for it is now the middle of September. How near those other houses are! One can look right into them; colored people occupy them, too. How delightful! What charming neighbors!" Suddenly she started. "Oh! Surely that is Thomas! No, it isn't. Yes it is, too, and he sees me; oh, if he only knows me! If I only dared to call to him, but they would hear me. I will wave my handkerchief. There, he sees me, he does know me, he is putting his finger on his lips for me to be still. I am saved, saved at last! But saved to what? Life with that old man. Heaven save me! I don't know but that this imprisonment is preferable. Oh, if father can only save me from him," and she began to walk the floor, restlessly flinging herself, first into one chair, and then another. When her dinner was brought to her, she could not touch it.

"Oh! Would they never come for her? Hark! There were heavy steps on the stairs, the door opened, and a moment later, Bessie was in her father's arms, Thomas and the detective discreetly examining the window, and otherwise engaging their attention.

The woman of the house was voluble in her explanations.

"I didn't know there was any harm in it. I was paid for it, and thought it was all right. What is to become of me and the children, if you arrest me? Take pity on a poor widow, and think what the money was to me."

"Be quiet, woman," replied Mr. Darrow. "I will take no action against you in this matter, but let me tell you that had you come to me in the first place and told me where my daughter was, you would never have wanted for anything again; it would have been worth more to you than you could have made, had she been your prisoner for ten years. Come, Bessie," and half-carrying the trembling girl, he put her in the carriage, and in another half-hour she was once more safe in her pretty room with Aunt Dorothy tenderly caring for her.

After dinner that evening they gathered in the library, and Bessie, sitting on her father's knee, with his arm around her slight figure, told them her story.

"I thought to get a breath of fresh air without troubling you or Aunt Dorothy about it. It was so nearly dark, I did not think any one would know me, so I put on an ulster and heavy vail, intending to go around the block once; as I turned the corner, I saw the coachman brushing out the stable. He went in just then, to fasten up for the night, as I supposed, but as I passed in front of the door, I felt myself suddenly covered with something heavy, dragged into the carriage-room, shoved into a corner, and then I heard a key click. A moment more, and the carriage robe which had been thrown over me was removed, and a gag placed in my mouth. It was too dark for me to see, but I took it for granted that it must be the coachman who had caught me there. When the gag was secured and my hands firmly tied, I was left alone, and on feeling around as best I could I discovered that I was in the little harness-room. A few moments later the door was opened, I

was lifted up, carried out, placed in a close carriage, and driven to the house where you found me. The woman seemed prepared for my coming, but did not have the room as nicely furnished as it afterward was. For weeks I remained without seeing a person but the woman, or having an idea as to whom my captor was, or what had been his object. About a month afterward—"

"Just the time that man left my service," interposed Mr. Darrow.

"Yes, about that time, Mrs. Green told me that the gentleman who had brought me there had taken the front room. At once my thoughts flew to Mr. Doubleday. Had he taken this means of securing me? Was he afraid to take me home, so had brought me here to frighten me into subjection? My room had been nicely furnished; my meals had been excellent; I had been furnished, not only with necessities, but luxuries; more than that, I had had a plentiful supply of painting materials, and had even taken heart to do a little work. Was it *his* money, I asked myself, that had done all this? Judge of my surprise when, upon a gentleman being announced, your coachman walked in, dressed as a gentleman, it is true, and with a great show of superiority—but the coachman. At first I was too surprised to speak. When I did, I ordered him out of the room. I soon realized how completely I was in his power. He said he had a grudge of long standing against you, and Roy Doubleday, too, and that you might hunt for me now. He would wring money enough from the two to repay all he had against them. I knew it was useless to try to help myself. I appealed to the woman, but she was a rock. Finally I took to painting, and, as the days grew longer, I worked early and late, but as fast as I did anything, Mr. Stevens, as he told me to call him, carried it away. He must have made a small fortune, for I know what such work is worth."

"Brute!" muttered Mr. Darrow.

"Well, things went on about the same until now. I have suffered intensely from the heat in that close place, but have kept from sickness. I have wondered that he had the taste to supply me so well, and above all, how he found out about my painting."

"Have you never guessed that there was some one behind him?"

"I did think of it at first, but I could think of no one, as he so positively said that he was trying to injure Mr. Doubleday as well as yourself."

"Did you ever suspect your mother?"

"My mother? No, indeed! She could not have done such a thing; and had she, it is probable she would have come to see me and let me know she had an eye on me, instead of leaving me to the mercy of a man."

"Ah, Bessie, even with all your trouble, you are still too innocent to mistrust those who would do you most harm."

"What do you mean?"

"Only that when you have reached my age, you will have learned that even your mother cannot be trusted. It was she, as well as Stevens, as he calls himself, who kept you in solitary confinement."

"Oh, father!"

"What did she care for her child, if, through her, she could injure me? What does she care for anything but money? Money and revenge, as she is pleased to call it. Though, God knows, I did my duty by her, and more."

There was silence for a few moments, then Bessie broke it: "Tell me your part of the story, father."

"You remember, Bessie, my reason for leaving your mother?"

"Yes."

"I had hoped, when I settled here to remain unmolested by her. I certainly never expected to find a spy among my very servants. That man, Stevens, was no other than Stephen Smith, on whose account my whole life has been miserable. He had kept track of me, and, hoping to make money out of me in some way, took service here, knowing I would

never recognize him after my long absence. He kept your mother informed of my whereabouts, and when her hopes of making money out of Mr. Doubleday were gone, she came here. Between them they planned your abduction, though they were scarcely prepared for so sudden a chance. Smith saw his opportunity, and carried out their plan several days before she knew anything about it. He kept away purposely to avert suspicion, and although we watched her house for a fortnight, we found not the slightest clew, and gave it up, that is, the detectives did. I had taken Thomas into my confidence, and he, without troubling me, has been the means of finding you, long after the detectives had given up the search."

"Oh, you cannot know the relief it was to see his face at that window."

"We can imagine, dear," replied Aunt Dorothy.

"He suspected Stevens of something, he didn't know what, when he first came. When you disappeared, he at once fixed on him, and Stevens knew or felt it, and left me as soon as he could plausibly do so, but Thomas never lost sight of him; he even followed him to Newport, a fortnight since, and it was not until after their return that he managed to find the house where you were, and even then he had no proof that you were there. He had been to Brooklyn in the winter, and made friends with Mrs. Britton's servant, she having got a colored girl. From the girl he learned all he cared to know of Smith's going and coming, and enough to convince him that Mrs. Britton was in the plot, but he had been unable to find the house you were in. When he finally did, he went around to the next street, a well-known colored quarter, and insinuated himself into the good graces of some of the families there. In that way he managed to watch the back of your house, but did not catch a glimpse of you until to-day. What a detective that man would make!"

"Well, father, you have me again, but I suppose you can't keep me long. That dreadful knot is tied as tightly as ever."

"But I have found a way to untie it."

"What do you mean? Is it really so that you can free me from this miserable bondage?"

"Quite true."

"Then I am happy indeed."

"And we are happy for thee, child; and for ourselves, to have thee with us," said Aunt Dorothy, her joy and love shining forth from her gentle eyes.

"Tell me how this can be, father."

"When Thomas was in Newport, he heard the rumor that Mr. Doubleday was engaged to Miss Verplanck. That rumor has since been confirmed in fashionable society. So you are safe. Rather than have an *esclandre*, he will quietly get a divorce when he finds out that you have come to light. Then you will be safe, and happy, I hope."

"Yes indeed, I shall be happy," and I mean to stay at home with you always, she replied, but her eyes filled with tears, and her heart throbbed with pain as she thought of the love she had lost, of the man who would scorn her now, were he near enough to know aught about her.

"You have a fortnight for rest anyway. They will not return from Newport until the first of October. Supposing we take a little trip somewhere to bring back the roses to your cheeks. What say you, Aunt Dorothy?"

"The very thing, I should say. Take her away by all means."

So it was settled. The next evening, Bessie had left the city which had become so distasteful to her.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOME AGAIN.

DURING the second week in October, one could scarcely imagine that three or four weeks previously the world had fairly gasped for breath. In M. S. Verplanck's dining-room the curtains were drawn.

and a bright fire blazed in the low-down grate, strongly suggestive of winter.

Viva and Mr. Doubleday formed two of the party gathered round the table. It was a family party, given in honor of Paula's engagement, but others were expected after the dinner. This engagement in high life had made quite a stir in society, and was to be formally acknowledged that night. Whatever Viva thought of it, how she may have felt, no one knew; to outward appearances she was as pleased as any one. And even she never dreamed that Paula was throwing herself away; never guessed that Paula had loved her brother with all the love of which she was capable, and that pique alone had prompted this strange marriage of youth to age.

"Your friend, Mr. Darrow, returned to-day, papa," Viva said, during a pause in the conversation. "We were returning from our drive just as his carriage drove up to his door, and he had the loveliest young girl with him; such a delicate complexion, and the most golden hair I ever saw. I wonder— Why, papa, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, child, nothing but the heat. I am too near the fire, I think. There, it is past now," but it was several minutes before he recovered his color, and a close observer might have seen his hand tremble.

"I had a good look at her," Viva continued, "and I could scarcely take my eyes off from her. She made me think of the description I once heard Roy give of the girl who painted my dress; he fairly raved. I wonder if Mr. Darrow has been seeking a bride?"

The conversation soon changed, but Mr. Doubleday was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. To him the evening seemed endless. To stand and receive the congratulations of his friends on his coming marriage, when his rightful wife was alive, and not a block away, was more than he could endure. His hair nearly rose at the thought of the scandal, should this prove to be so. The misery of those few hours was a well-deserved punishment to him. But when he was at home again, he was no better off. Would the night never pass? When it did, what would the daylight bring? He had not many hours to wait. During breakfast he was summoned to the library to confront Mr. Darrow.

"I have heard of your engagement to Miss Verplanck, Mr. Doubleday, and, as Bessie's father, have come to demand an explanation."

"I have long since given Bessie up. I cannot spend my whole life mourning for her. She is gone, and I am free to do as I please."

"What proof have you of her death?"

"Well, none, exactly. But her desertion gives me the right to free myself."

"Have you freed yourself?"

"By divorce, do you mean? No, but I can, if it is necessary." Here was an opening for escape; here lay his only hope; he must cling to it.

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Mr. Darrow, "that you would thus readily free yourself from the woman from whom, six months since, you swore nothing should separate you? Whose tears and entreaties to the contrary were of no avail?"

"Yes, I mean it. A man can't spend his whole life in begging a woman to be his wife, even the loveliest. I prefer a woman whose choice I am, as well as she mine."

"Roy Doubleday, I take you at your word. Give me a written promise here, this hour, that you will quietly obtain a divorce from your wife, and my child, Elizabeth Britton, and when the papers are placed in my hands, I will leave you in peace. Refuse to do so, and I will publish to the world what a scoundrel you are, and your beautiful fiancée shall know that you have wooed and won her with another wife, *living!*"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Doubleday, in well-feigned surprise.

"That your wife is living, and in my house, and that it is in my power to brand you in the eyes of the world."

"Great heavens! What a fix I'm in! What shall I do? I'll do anything you think best, Darrow, only keep this from being made public."

"You will submit to my terms?"

"Yes."

"I am as anxious to keep this private, as you. I do not care to see my daughter's name dragged into the papers. Get an absolute divorce, freeing her entirely, and I shall leave you to your own affairs. You may marry a Feejee Islander, for all I care. But first, give me a written promise to that effect."

The paper was made out and signed, and Mr. Darrow rose.

"It is unnecessary for me to give you the details of the finding of my daughter. You have lost all interest in her, and it is enough to know that she is safe. I should like to ask, however, if you ever had any dealings with a man named Stephen Smith?"

"Smith? I should think I did. I had him sent up once for two years, for an attempt at burglary. What has he to do with it?"

"He had a hand in her abduction, that is all. Good-morning."

After he had gone, Mr. Doubleday sat in thought. Well, I have got off easily. I expected a regular row. So Smith was trying to pay off an old grudge. He has succeeded in doing me more good than harm, for Bessie would never have made as good a head to the house as Paula. How under the sun he ever knew anything of my marriage puzzles me. Come in," in answer to a knock. "Will wonders never cease? I thought you were on the other side of the Atlantic, Roy," for it was Roy who had thus unexpectedly appeared on the scene.

"Viva wrote me of your intended marriage, and I came to see what it meant."

"Hear the boy talk to his father."

"Yes, hear me. I have a right to be heard. After acting in a very underhanded way, and spoiling my life for me, I hear that you, a married man, are again to take the marriage vows. I will prevent it; our name shall not be thus dishonored—"

"Hold there, Roy! Not quite so fast. I am free to marry whom I please. I have no wife—"

"You mean she is dead?" cried Roy.

"Not to the world, but to me. I have given her her freedom, and to-day she can marry you, or any man she pleases, and I may marry whom I please. Now are you satisfied, rash boy?"

"I am not a boy, nor to be treated as such, as I have proven to you. May I ask what has led you to this step?"

"Well, Roy, it seemed a pity to cut you out. I have lived my life; you have yours before you. I thought she might better be happy with you than unhappy with me, and I did not want you to be a wanderer from home, so I decided to leave us all free to do as we pleased. I have made my choice, and Viva is charmed. I see no reason why you should not be."

Roy believed his father, he had never had reason to do otherwise; so he went in search of Viva with a lighter heart than he had known in months.

In another house, the scene between father and child was somewhat different. Bessie was awaiting anxiously her father's return from his interview. Could this be the same pale, wan girl that had left the house a month before to find roses for her cheeks, and brightness for her eyes? Never had she been lovelier; the roses had indeed been found, and every charm enhanced by the mountain air and rest she had enjoyed. What a picture she made, as she stood breathlessly awaiting his first words, as Mr. Darrow entered the room. He could not refrain from folding her in his arms as he exclaimed:

"Bessie, my child, you are free."

"Father, is it so?"

"Yes, dear, see," and he unfolded the paper Mr. Doubleday had signed. "In a short time all will be done, and you will be free."

"Yes, free to stay with you for life, dear father."

"I fear not."

"Why?"

"Because, as I left Mr. Doubleday's his son passed me on the steps.

Bessie flushed to her temples, then the blood receded, leaving her very pale.

"That can make no difference. He is nothing to me, nor I to him."

"Time will show. I want you to promise to live with me when you do marry. I cannot lose you again."

"I will live with you always; and I shall never marry. One experiment will be enough for me."

Her father smiled, but did not argue the question with her. He would be glad to see her happily married, which he felt sure he would.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT LAST.

THE Doubleday-Verplanck wedding had been a very grand affair, quite the event of the season. All the "dear five hundred" of both families had been invited, and Grace Church could scarcely hold them. The bridal pair had gone to Florida, leaving Viva and Roy in possession of the house.

Roy had tried twice to see Bessie, but as often had been refused. He resolved now, however, to see her and once more plead his cause. Surely she would not refuse him now. With hopeful heart he hastened up the avenue one morning, only to find the house deserted. An old woman, answering his ring, informed him that the family were in California. No, she could not give the address, nor how long they intended remaining. Disheartened, he turned away.

That night at dinner, Viva was complaining of the loneliness.

"I tell you what, Viva, let's take a trip to California. It will be fun, and quite astonish the governor and Paula. We will be home again before they are."

"Isn't it rather unsafe, crossing the mountains at this season?"

"All the more fun to be snowed in a few days. I believe I'll go, anyway."

"Oh, don't leave me here quite alone. I will go; when shall we start?"

"As soon as you can get ready."

"A week from to-day, then."

"A week! Why don't you say a year, and be done with it?"

"I can't run off in a minute; I've engagements to cancel, and plenty to do."

"Say Saturday night, then; this is Tuesday."

"You unreasonable boy! Well, I suppose it must be just as you say. Come up-stairs, and sing for me."

Saturday found them spinning westward. The days seemed to Roy to drag. Would he find her in San Francisco? if he did, would she still refuse to see him? were questions that he asked himself hourly.

"How you have changed!" Viva said to him one day. "You are so silent, so thoughtful; you seem so much older since your return. You act as though you had been slighted in love."

"Perhaps I have."

"Then I think you might tell me about it."

After thinking a few minutes, Roy did tell her as much as he could, reserving the fact that his own father had been the old gentleman to whom his darling had been sold for gold. He acknowledged that the young lady was the same she had seen with Mr. Darrow, and told her how she had found her father. Viva was deeply interested, and promised to do all in her power to help him.

"No wonder you were so anxious to visit California," she said.

They had been in San Francisco ten days, yet nothing had they seen of the family for whom they were looking, nor could they find their names on any of the hotel registers. Roy was in despair, and finally gave up, and declared his intention of return-

ing home. Leaving Viva one day, he strolled into the Botanic Gardens, to wile away an hour.

Turning a corner round some shrubbery, he suddenly came face to face with Bessie, sitting alone, with a book in her hand.

"Bessie," he cried, sitting down beside her.

She looked him calmly in the face while she spoke.

"I have refused to see you; now that we have met, and I can not refuse you, I will hear what you have to say."

"How coldly you speak! Bessie, I have followed you all the way here to ask you to be my wife. Surely you will not refuse me?"

"I certainly shall. Do you think you would care to marry your father's wife? If so, I tell you you are mistaken."

"His wife! That was nothing but a mockery. You are not his wife; you never were in heart. I should never let that be a hindrance."

"But I should. I have said no; abide by my decision."

"You are cruel. You cannot care for me, or you would not treat me so. Bessie, do you love me?"

"It matters not; you have no right to ask—"

"You do not! I have been fooled by a pair of blue eyes; lied to by a pair of lips fit for an angel. Women are all alike, they have no heart. I will leave you, but if ever you love any one, I hope you won't be treated as you have treated me," saying which, he was gone, and Bessie hurried back to her boarding-house, to shed bitter tears.

"He despises me already, because I had strength to refuse him. Had I married him, it might have been worse when it would have been too late to remedy it. I am glad I refused him, but oh! it will break my heart."

They had intended turning eastward that night, but Bessie was so feverish and ill that Aunt Dorothy thought it best to wait another twenty-four hours. She did not reproach the girl for what she had done, although she thought she had acted foolishly.

As for Roy, he returned to his hotel, told Viva what had happened, paid his bill, bought his tickets, and started for home on the same train that was to have carried Bessie homeward.

It was not a pleasant journey for Viva. Roy took good care of her, but was so gloomy that she could do nothing with him, until the third night, and then—a crash, a shock, and human beings, cars, engines, were a solid mass. A freight train had dropped its last car, undiscovered in the darkness, and the express train had run into it. Fortunately, the cars did not take fire, or the loss of life must have been great; as it was, many were severely injured, Roy Doubleday among the number. Viva had escaped with bruises, but Roy was badly cut about the head, and rendered totally unfit for travel.

A hospital was quickly improvised for the wounded, and men dispatched to the nearest station for help, but hours elapsed before any could reach them out on the plains, as they were. By daylight, many had become feverish and worse, in absence of medical aid. Roy was out of his head, and living over again his refusal from Bessie; it was piteous to hear him. He must be moved as soon as possible to proper quarters; he would be a very sick man, the doctor had said. Viva was in sore distress, and had no one to send to for help, as her father and Paula were in the South.

The track was being cleared, and the next express would be stopped to take in the wounded, at least. Viva watched and waited through the longest hours of her life, and the next night, at the hour of the accident, the train came, stopped, took on its burden, and went on again, flying eastward, while Viva sat with Roy's hand in hers, listening to his moans, and vaguely wondering what she should do next. Suddenly there was a stir in the next berth, then a gentle tap on her shoulder. Looking up, she saw, in the dim light, a sweet old Quaker lady.

"Thee has trouble, my child. What has happened?"

At these kind words, Viva broke down, and with sobs and tears explained her trouble, and said:

"What I am to do, I don't know, for I cannot take him home; he would not live to reach New York, and yet I know no place where I can take him."

"Do not trouble thyself, dear. We will see to thee, and I will stay with thee, until thee can safely journey on. When morning comes, I will consult with George. In the mean time, rest thyself in my berth while I watch."

Viva yielded, and morning found her much refreshed, after some hours of sleep. The kind Quakeress, however, was anything but rested in mind. Roy, in his mutterings, had betrayed his identity, and she was puzzled to know what was best to do. Hearing Bessie astir, she quickly made up her mind, just as Roy was opening his eyes, as consciousness slowly returned. Leaving him, she sought Bessie, took her by the hand, led her to his berth, and gently pushed her inside the curtain.

"Roy, oh Roy! What has happened?"

"Bessie! Is it you? You are cruel to come here to mock me in my misery. Why are you here?"

"Roy, dear Roy!"

"You do not mean it—I am not dear to you? I shall die, and you can be happy just the same."

"Die! Oh, Roy! don't die! Live, live for me! I love you. I always have; I cannot live without you."

"Bessie, do you mean it? Can I believe—"

Just then Aunt Dorothy returned.

"Thee has talked enough. I forbid thee to speak another word. Bessie, give him this medicine, then some of this ice, and after that, he must sleep again. I leave him in thy care for the present."

With a grateful look, Roy took the medicine from Bessie's hand, then sunk back exhausted.

Viva's surprise may be imagined, on returning to Roy, to find him sleeping peacefully, with Bessie's hand clasped in his. Her face brightened, as she laid a detaining hand on Bessie as she arose to go.

"I know who you are, and for my brother's sake I ask you to stay," she said, with a kiss on Bessie's forehead.

So it was, that Bessie found her happiness at last.

When Mr. Darrow rose, there was a discussion, and it was decided to leave the train at the first large town, and get Roy into a comfortable hotel. They would all stay with Viva, and in due time start homeward together.

Through long weeks of watching, Bessie proved a faithful nurse. There came a time when no one expected that the morrow would find Roy alive, but loving care brought him safely through, and society was electrified, just after Lent, by the announcement of the marriage, in a remote Western town, of Le Roy Doubleday, junior, to Bessie Britton, daughter of George Darrow, Esq., all of New York.

THE END.

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